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THE TWIN HORSEMEN



NO SOONER DID THE THOUGHT CROSS HIS MIND THAN HE STRUCK A FUSEE AND MADE A STEP
TOWARD THE LION, SHOUTING ANGRILY.

The Twin Horsemen ;

OR,

The Brothers of the Plumed Lance.

A Tale of the Great Syrian Desert.

BY CAPT. FREDERICK WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "THE LOST CAPTAIN," "THE
SWORD-HUNTERS," ETC., ETC.

INTRODUCTION.

LET us take a trip over the ocean. Who would not travel when he can see the world for five cents?

We will cross the wide Atlantic, where the waves toss showers of gold up to meet the rising sun; where the whales are spouting; where the little swordfish—tiger of the seas—dares after the swift bonito, rapier in advance, and the bonito in turn chases the flying-fish.

We will sail past the Rock of Gibraltar, past Algiers with its white walls, and Malta, gem of the sea; past Alexandria on the south, till we land among the breakers of Jaffa, and then ride away by Jerusalem, out to the free desert.

Ride with the sons of Ishmael on their raids, mounted on mares of the famous "Kehilan Ajuz" strain, that all of Vanderbilt's millions could not buy.

This is our aim, this our destination.
Come, let us ride with the Boy Rovers.

CHAPTER I.

OUR CONSUL AT DAMASCUS.

DOWN in the southwest of any large map of Asia, you will notice the town of Damascus.

Here we are at the American Consulate, a huge palace built round a court-yard full of fountains and roses, with fifty or sixty rooms in the building.

We can tell it is the consulate, because the Stars and Stripes are floating over the corner of the house; and it makes us feel proud to note the respect paid to that flag.

Something is going on at the consulate, and in the street beside it. The house has two courts, one full of fountains and flowers, the other quite plain, and opening on a narrow street by means of a huge archway. This second is the stable court, and just now it is full of people, the consul and his two sons being conspicuous among them.

That tall man dressed in a blue flannel semi-military suit, with an empty sleeve pinned up, is Colonel Benton, American Consul at Damascus. He lost his arm at Five Forks, and was sent to his present post after the war. He is a Kentuckian by birth, and he stands six feet in his stockings.

Those two slim, handsome lads, who have just mounted and are listening to him as he speaks, are his twin sons, Launcelot and Charles Benton, who go by the names of Launce and Charley.

They are as like as two peas in face and figure,

but there is a striking contrast in their dispositions, though they are twins.

Launce is always restless and eager to be on the move; hot tempered; quick as a flash to fight; easily propitiated by kindness; a very quick learner of his lessons, and very apt to be careless; Charley is slow, methodical, a hard student, very peaceable in disposition, but never to be appeased if he once gets angry.

The contrast between them is shown in their bodily exercises. Launce cannot shoot save with a pistol on snap shots, but he is exceedingly fond of fencing, and handles sword and lance well. Charley cares nothing for fencing, but he is a dead shot.

The boys seemed to be equipped for a long journey, and were mounted on tall handsome mules, with extravagantly-tasseled head-gear and housings, while they are surrounded by the consul's servants, headed by Demetri, the consular cawass.

The cawass is a sort of head policeman or guard, found at all the Eastern consulates, who takes messages, escorts his chief, and looks as gorgeous as possible.

Demetri is a handsome Greek, with a piratical mustache and about two thousand dollars' worth of gold lace, velvet, silk and jewelry on his person, either in his dress or on his pistols, rifle and *yataghan*, or curved dagger.

He looks like a fellow who is not afraid to fight hard at a pinch, and neither is he. In fact, Demetri has killed more than one man in his time, but always in defense of the American flag, of which he is intensely proud, though he has never seen America.

"Now, boys," said Colonel Benton, "I want you to keep one thing in mind while you are away, that civility and dignity will save you from a good many troubles. Be civil but distant to all, except the head sheik; for all the other Arabs will try to take liberties with you, on account of your youth. I am trusting you with a great responsibility, but Demetri is a right good and safe guide as to your behavior."

"We will be careful, sir," replies Launce, smiling in his eager, boyish way; but Charley says nothing.

"There are only two boys of your own age with whom you can afford to be intimate or friendly," continues the colonel. "They are Felaal and Sotamm, the sons of the old Sheik Sotamm of the Roala tribe. Sotamm—the old man—owes me his life, for I insisted on his release once, when the Turks had captured him under a flag of truce. He told me to come to him whenever I needed a friend in the Desert, so be careful of my letter to him."

"And what are we to do to get the mares that Major Buckner wants?" asks Charley, in a sober, earnest way.

"That I must leave to yourselves. If you can buy them, do so. My word is good all over the Hammad. But I fear you cannot do that, for the Arabs seldom or never sell their mares. Do what you can for my friend; but if you do nothing else, you will have learned a good deal worth knowing, by the time you come back. Now good-by, boys."

The ex-soldier embraces his sons with an appearance of composure he is far from feeling,

and the little party rides out of the court, Demetri leading, to join the camels, waiting outside the walls of Damascus.

While they are riding away, it is time to tell our readers all about them.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOY BEDOUINS.

LAUNCE and Charley are true American boys, though neither of them has ever set foot in the United States, since he came to Damascus at four years old.

Their American mother died about ten years ago, and the twins are now about nineteen. Besides English and French, which they have learned at home, they speak Arabic and Turkish with the same ease that we talk English. They have heard those languages spoken all round them from infancy, especially Arabic.

They have made short trips to the Desert before as little children; for Colonel Benton was always a popular man with the Arabs, and frequently interceded for them with the Turkish authorities.

The cause of their going is simple. The colonel comes from the Blue Grass Country of Kentucky and is a most enthusiastic horseman. Like all his generous countrymen, he would do anything to oblige a friend; and his old school friend Major Jim Buckner of Carrollton, a great breeder of thoroughbreds, has sent over to him a letter imploring him to get him a horse and as many mares as possible, *of the very best blood of Arabia*, to improve his stock.

For Major Jim has heard wonderful things of the Arabian horses, and is determined to try whether they will do any good in the Blue Grass Region.

His instructions are to spare no expense, but get them *somehow*.

And it so happens that in his fifteen years, residence on the borders of the Desert, Colonel Benton has learned a good deal about Arabian horses that one can learn nowhere else.

So the colonel has sent his boys to the wild Desert, in search of his friend Sotamm, Sheik of the Roala, to find the horses for his other friend, Major Jim.

The little caravan is composed of the *cawass*, Demetri, at the head, mounted on a stout half-breed horse, and armed with about a dozen revolvers, more or less, besides a Winchester rifle; for Demetri has a just preference for American firearms, being a Yankee Greek *cawass*.

Then come the two boys, similarly armed, but modestly content with a pair of revolvers and a rifle; Launce carrying in addition a keen curved saber, of which he is very fond.

Last follow four of the consul's servants, leading as many baggage camels, loaded with a tent, provisions, skins of water, carpets and so on, ready to set up housekeeping when they stop.

For in the Desert one must carry all one needs even to water for drinking or starve by the way. The wells are often three or five days' journey apart, and the only thing found on the road is dry camel dung and skeletons, to make up fires at night.

Now our little party is clear of the last out-lying fields of Damascus, and the pungent air

of the Desert smites their nostrils with a keen sense of mingled pleasure and pain, that reminds one of hartshorn spirits.

"Hurrah!" cries Launce with his usual gay laugh; "out in the Desert again. Charley, isn't it glorious? I feel as if I could gallop for miles and never tire, if I had a good Kehilan Ajuz mare instead of this old plug of a mule."

Charley smiles gravely.

"I suppose so, and you'd kill your mare with running, no matter what her breed. I'm content to take it easy the first day. We'll be tired enough before we reach the tents of the Roala, Launce."

"I wish we were there now. By-the-by, Charley, it's about time for the flowers to be up, and we haven't seen any. This is April the First, you know."

"The flowers don't begin on this part of the Hammad till June I've heard my father say. The rains come so seldom here that they sometimes leave it bare all the year round."

"Well, I wish we could see some one or something," retorts Launce impatiently.

"This going along over a plain will get monotonous, after we've worn off the novelty of the fresh air. Hola, Demetri, when do you expect to reach the first wells by this road?"

"Not before Tadmor, t'ree days, signor," replies the Greek in English with a salute. "De road is in good ordare; but de vinter 'ave been very dry, and de pool is all emptee. Dey tell me it did rain very moch on de Euphrates. Ven ve get dere, ve vill see."

They travel along all day over a level brown plain, the road to Tadmor marked by the white bones of camels, and toward evening the country begins to roll a little.

Then also they see the first flowers; purple stocks, yellow marigolds, pinks and blue geraniums, all growing wild in the desert, their original home. The camels know the purple stocks and crop at them eagerly as they walk, and Launce begins to look more pleased, when Demetri stops of a sudden, and holds up his hand.

"Arabs on a *ghazou*," he says.

The boys look ahead, and see, on the horizon, a moving figure that disappears behind a swell. Only a glimpse, but there is no mistaking the fluttering cloak and plumed lance of a Bedouin.

And a single Bedouin in the desert means one out on a *ghazou* or raid, his hand against every man. It is only at home amid his flocks and herds that it is safe to approach an Arab.

The *cawass* looks grave.

"That is one of their scouts," he says; "and they may have a strong party behind that hill. I fear we must go back, for it is not safe to proceed with night coming on. I heard the road to Tadmor was clear of Arabs, but it seems it is not."

Demetri is a townsman who does not like Arabs and wants an excuse to go back to Damascus; but Launce indignantly answers him:

"Go back! Nonsense! We came out to find the Bedouins, and here they are. I say we ought to go on. What do you think, Charley?"

"I say go on, of course," answered Charley, in his composed way. "Let's see who they are. They may be Roala."

Demetri again objects.

"The Roala never come to this part of the Desert; they are in the South. If these men are anything they must be Shammar, out after the flocks of the Aneyza, and in that case they will be our foes."

"Nevertheless, let us go on," say both the brothers, and the little party jogs on, the servants looking scared and anxious, but not daring to remonstrate; while Demetri unslings his rifle and looks to his cartridges in a dogged sort of way, as if he disclaimed responsibility for what is about to happen.

Presently, as they ride on, they see another scout come over the hillock, and a few moments later a dozen or fifteen Arabs canter across another swell and come dashing toward the little party.

It is evident that they are in for it now, and Demetri takes command in the emergency, making the camels kneel down, and forming his six men—including the brothers—behind them as a breastwork in the form of a square, with the mules in the center. Then they wait and watch the Arabs riding down on them.

Picturesque, dashing fellows they are, mounted on slender graceful mares that gallop along with low easy strides, the riders clad in blue shirts and white or striped cloaks, with red and yellow handkerchiefs of triangular shape bound on their heads by camel's hair cords round the forehead. They have no bridles, only a slender halter, and ride on a cotton pad without stirrups. They seem to have no arms but long cane lances, plumed with ostrich feathers.

On they come at the same easy stretching gallop, till Demetri calls out in Arabic:

"Stop! There is nothing for enemies but a bullet in this camp. You have come far enough. What seek you?"

The Arabs halt and cluster together in a way that would be fatal were they to be fired into, and then two of them stick their lances into the sand, fasten their mares to them, leap off and come toward the breastworks all unarmed.

Demetri is about to warn them off again, when Launce whispers:

"Let them alone. You don't know they are not friends."

"In the Desert no man is a friend," replies the cawass sententiously, but for all that he refrains from firing.

And as the Arabs approach, one may see they are both boys, slender and graceful as fawns, with smooth olive faces, regular features full of intellect, and dark luminous eyes.

"*Salam Aleikoum!*" says one of them as he comes, meaning—"Peace be unto you," the ordinary Arabic greeting.

"*Aleikoum Salam,*" answers Launce, as he stands up, throwing his rifle over his arm. "What tribe are you?"

"Aneyza," says the young Arab proudly. "What do you here on our plains?"

"Aneyza what?" demands Launce.

He knows that Aneyza is only the name of a confederation of tribes.

"Aneyza Sebaa," replied the boy.

Launce looks disappointed, but asks:

"Don't you know where the tents of the Roala lie? I want to find them."

"What do you want with the Roala?" the boy retorts suspiciously. "Don't you know there is war between the Sebaa and the Roala? Are you a friend of the Roala?"

Demetri makes a sign to his young master to deny it, but headlong Launce will not see it. He believes in telling the truth.

"Certainly we are friends of the Roala," he answers. "We are sons of Benton Pasha, the American, and want to find the Sheik Sotamm, our father's friend. If you will guide us to his camp, I will give you a hundred piasters."

A hundred piasters sounds large, but it is only five dollars of our money, though worth twenty in Turkey.

To the intense surprise of Demetri, the young Arab bursts out laughing.

"Take you there!" he cries. "Why, my friends, I am Sotamm's son myself. Your father's children are my brother's forever."

CHAPTER III.

THE GHAZOU.

DEMETRI looked very much relieved at the good news thus coming to him; but Charley put up his hand before Launce, who was rushing out, and said in English:

"Keep cool. How do you know he is not fooling you? He said he was a Sebaa."

"Dey all lie, w'en dey out on ghazou, signori," observed Demetri. "De Arab never tell trut' den."

"And how are we to find if he tells it now?" asked Charley.

Then turning to the boy Arab, he said in Arabic:

"First you tell us you are Sebaa, and that they are at war with Roala, and then you say you are Roala. Why do you tell lies?"

The young Arab showed his white teeth in another boyish laugh.

When I said Sebaa, I thought you were enemies. Now I know who you are, I tell the truth. I am Sotamm *ben Sotamm* (son of Sotamm), and here is my brother Telaal. You are called Lansa and Shahlee, and my father and yours are brothers. Do you wish more proof? See here our amulets, given us both at our birth by your father. Do you know them?"

The boy handed over to Charley a locket, opened with a spring, containing on one side a portrait of Washington; on the other, the ugly, benevolent face of Lincoln.

There was no more doubt, and even Charley dropped his rifle and hastened to embrace his Bedouin brothers, whom he had not seen since they were children of two or three years old.

Then Launce said to Telaal, who seemed to be as silent as Charley:

"And what brings you out here? I thought the tribe was away to the south."

Telaal smiled proudly.

"We are on our first *ghazou*," he said. "The Sebaa and Roala have quarreled about pastureage by the Euphrates, and our father sent us out to earn our mares and call ourselves men."

It seemed strange to hear the boys tell about their first *ghazou*, for they were only fourteen, being five years younger than our American Bedouins; but boys grow up quickly among

the Arabs and learn to assume responsibility early.

Now the boy sheiks beckoned to their men to come forward and Launce was introduced to several grave, wrinkled warriors, and a number of youngsters in their teens, out on the *ghazou*.

It being dark, or nearly so, Demetri proposed that they should go into camp together for common protection; but young Sotamm objected at once.

"When one is on a *ghazou* he never enters a tent or lights a fire," he said. "My brothers can encamp, but as for us, we have a long way to ride to-night."

"Why, where are you going?" asked Launce, innocently.

Telaal smiled and Sotamm answered:

"When one is on a *ghazou* he answers no questions; but as you are my brother I will tell you. We are going after the outlying flocks of the Sebaa to-night, an hour's ride from here."

"Oh, take me with you!" cried Launce, impulsively. "There's nothing I should like better."

Then he added, more quietly:

"That is, if my mule be not too slow."

Sotamm hesitated and smiled.

"It is not that, my brother; but mules are obstinate, and they *will* make a noise when you don't want them. Still, if you wish to come—can you handle a lance?"

Launce laughed at the question.

"I can beat any one I ever saw at that and the saber."

Telaal made a movement of interest.

"Is my brother in earnest? We have good men with the lance among us."

For answer Launce picked up one of the long camel-sticks, and made it quiver as he had seen the Arabs do, and Sotamm cried delightedly:

"He handles the lance! He is a true son of the Roala. Who will lend my brother his mare?"

A young Arab stepped forward.

"That will I, oh, son of Sotamm. The young Frank sheik is fit to ride her."

And thus it was arranged with very little trouble that Launce should go with the *ghazou* party, while young Jumah, who lent him his mare, should take the American's mule and guide the rest of the party to the tents of the Roala tribe.

Even Demetri, who was supposed to be the discreet person of the party, made no objection to this plan; for one place was as dangerous as another in the Hammad, and Charley remarked to his brother in English:

"It's a risky thing to do; but it will give us a better chance for what we are after, if we make good friends of them all at first."

But before the parties separated, two things were necessary: a feast and the oath of brotherhood, on which both the young Arabs insisted with their new-found friends.

"For," said Sotamm, "it would be shame to my father's tent if we parted thus."

So the consul's people went into camp, where Demetri made coffee and served out sardines and biscuits, to the awe and amazement of the

Arabs, who had never seen a sardine-box before; and they all ate and drank and broke bread and salt together in harmony.

Then said Telaal:

"It is time for the oath of brotherhood. Bear witness all."

The men of both parties stood silently and respectfully round, while the four boys stood in the center and took the oath in the solemn fashion of Bedouins, thus: Telaal and Launce, Sotamm and Charley, grasped each other by the belts with the left hand, and each lifted his right to Heaven, repeating solemnly in chorus the Arabic oath:

"*Wallah, wallahi!*" [God, my God!] three times aloud.

"*Billah, Billahi!*" [By God, my God!] thrice more.

"*Tillah, Tillahi!*" [To God, my God!]

"*Akwan, Akwan,*" [brother, brother] "*El yom, u bokrah, u baadan, akwan,*" [to-day, tomorrow, forever, brother.]

Then they embraced each other in the same solemn fashion, and from thenceforth were bound to aid each other at any and all times.

And a Bedouin never breaks the oath of brotherhood; but will keep it to the last drop of his blood.

Then Telaal said to his white brother:

"It is time we were going. We need neither guns nor pistols. Take Jumah's lance and give him your arms, all but the sword. A true Bedouin carries nothing but the lance. With that and his mare he dare go anywhere."

Launce willingly consented, and in a short time had completely metamorphosed his personal appearance by assuming the striped *aba* or cloak, and crimson *kefeeya* or head-shawl of Jumah; to whom he handed his own helmet and turban, with his coat and sash.

The Arab assumed the American's weapons and mounted the mule, while Launce sprung on the back of a lovely chestnut mare, and then, with a gay "*Salaam!*" the Bedouin brothers rode away on their *ghazou*, while quiet Charley Benton prepared to go into camp for the night.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEBAA.

THE moon was shining brightly over the Syrian Desert, hanging but a few degrees above the western horizon, and the dun tinge of early dawn was streaking the sky among the stars in the east.

The sweet scent of millions of flowers swept by on the faint breeze, and one might hear a rustling sound over the hillocks, as the vast flocks of the Sebaa nibbled at the herbage.

For the rains had come and the Desert was blooming like a garden, with stocks and marigolds, geraniums and asters, pinks and carnations, growing as wild and common as daisies with us.

Launce Benton and Telaal ben Sotamm lay on the top of a hillock in the desert, and looked down at the flocks of the Sebaa.

As far as the eye could see over the immense plain below them, sheep and camels were feeding, while a huge semicircle of black tents in

the midst showed where the tribe had encamped for the night.

Here and there among the flocks one might notice a mounted figure with a tufted spear, moving slowly about as if on guard—the out-lying vedettes. Behind the two watchers in the hollow were the other Arabs of the Roala *ghazou*. All had dismounted and were feeding their horses with a few handfuls of barley, in readiness for the dash that was coming. Launce had noticed that none of the Arabs had bridles on their animals, a simple halter sufficing to control their thoroughbred mares. Under the noseband of the halter was a fine chain which would exert a somewhat painful pressure when pulled hard, but Launce found that his own mare was as sensitive to the slight check as if he had used a severe curb, while she was able to feed at any time without unbridling. In common with the rest of the party he was riding her without any stirrups, mounted on a thick soft cotton pad, that prevented any semblance of sore back on the longest marches.

"What does my brother see?" asked the young American of Telaal, who was gazing down at the landscape. "Are we to charge down at once?"

Telaal made a sign for silence.

"In the Desert," he whispered, "a warrior never speaks above his breath. Be careful. I am waiting till the best of the camels come by, my brother."

As he spoke, Sotamm came creeping up beside them and looked down.

The light was sensibly but slowly growing brighter, so that now they could tell a camel from a horseman.

A few gleaming sparks in the middle of the encampment showed that the Arabs were stirring up the embers of the fires. Telaal whispered:

"Yonder are the camels. Now is our time," Sotamm nodded, and all three boys backed down off the hillock, ran to their mares, and then started to ride round the edge of the sand knoll.

A few moments later, Launce Benton, his veins thrilling with excitement, was galloping silently forward after the Bedouin boy chiefs, the whole party strung out in single file, making for a huge herd of camels feeding on the outskirts of the general gathering in a field of purple stocks.

They uttered no war-cry, but went on, swift and silent as ghosts, unseen among the herds, till they had gone near half a mile from the sheltering hillock.

The first intimation given of their presence was the stampede of a flock of sheep which started the rest on a run; and the next moment they heard the startled shouts of the mounted herdsmen, who began to drive their charges in toward the camp.

The cries were echoed from the tents, and then Telaal shouted the war-cry of the Aneyza Roalo; Sotamm and the others took it up in shrill chorus; and away raced the boy Bedouins toward the great herd of camels, starting it on a run to the south.

Now for some ten minutes all was wild confusion and flurry.

The camels roared with terror as they trotted away with huge strides at the rate of twelve miles an hour, and the young Roalas screamed out as they goaded the hindmost with their spears.

On went the Arabs and on went the camels, till the cries of the Sebaa became fainter, and Sotamm observed proudly:

"We have taken the camels and they cannot catch us. Our father will be proud of us."

Telaal looked back and shook his head.

"They are coming after us soon. We shall have a long fight, if we hope to save the camels."

Launce looked back also and could see, in the light of the now half-risen sun, the glitter of a clump of spears; evidently in pursuit.

"We shall have to fight," pursued the Arab boy; "because a mare is fleeter than a camel, and the Sebaa have good stock in their stables."

"So much the better," replied Launce cheerily. "We shall take some of the mares, my brother, and I can give Jumah back his own."

Telaal looked surprised.

"How! Do you think you can take a mare from her rider?"

"I can try," was the modest answer, and then the party urged on the camels again as the sun rose, and galloped on through a sea of flowers.

They had thus ridden for near an hour, when Launce, looking back, saw that the pursuing body of Sebaa was in plain sight, counting some thirty warriors, or ten more than their own force.

An old Arab who seemed to be the guide and counselor of the two boy chiefs, and who answered to the name of Mijuel, noticed him looking back and asked:

"What colored horses are in front, oh my lord?"

Launce looked again and said:

"A big white horse leads them all?"

The old Arab turned to Telaal.

"We shall beat them on the stony ground of the Wady Mustapha. It is here, and the white horse is gone."

As he spoke, Launce noticed they were entering a stony ravine, the bed of some old river; and, sure enough, as they galloped on and he looked back, their pursuers began to lose ground.

Before they had gone another mile the white horse had disappeared, and the leaders were two black steeds.

Presently the old Arab asked him again:

"What colored horses lead now, oh my lord?"

"Black," was the laconic reply; for Launce was beginning to feel the effects of the prolonged riding at speed.

Mijuel called out to Sotamm:

"The sun is hot and the way is long. We shall leave the black horses in the Desert, and they shall go home empty."

On went the camels, on went the Arabs; and now the Wady Mustapha was past and another stretch of flowers was before them.

The sun rose up into the heavens and blazed down on their heads; the sweat stood out white on the necks of the horses; their breath came heavy and labored; the camels were lagging in

their trot; but still the chase went on till near noon, when they could hear the shouts of the Sebaa behind them.

Then Mijuel again asked Launce, who was the only one of the party to look back:

"What colored horses lead now, my son?"

Launce looked back a long time.

The thirty Sebaa had dwindled to twenty or twenty-one, and nothing was to be seen but bays and chestnuts.

No sooner had he repeated the news than old Mijuel piously exclaimed:

"It is the will of Allah. We must fight now. Their horses are as good as ours, and we cannot shake them off."

When affairs came to this pass it was evident that Telaal and Sotamm, though nominally chiefs, were subject to the counsels of old Mijuel, who virtually assumed command.

"Let my lord send on three of the men with the camels," he cried out to Sotamm, "and with the rest we will stop the Sebaa."

Sotamm eagerly assented, and the old Arab told off the camel party in haste, then sprung off his horse, an example followed by all the rest, loosened the girths, and poured some water from a leathern bottle into the exhausted beast's mouth, the camels continuing on their way rejoicing.

It was done in a moment, and a good half pint of the precious fluid was poured down each mare's throat, before the Sebaa, their horses blown and laboring heavily, came within hailing distance.

Then the Roala party leaped on their own refreshed chargers and dashed right into the midst of their pursuers. The one mouthful of water had done wonders.

Launce Benton was, as we have before said, a skillful fencer, and had from his boyhood been accustomed to handle the lance in the Arab fantasias and games, or he would have fared ill in that battle.

He knew all the Arab tricks and a good many others of which the Arabs were ignorant; for he could parry with his point, whereas they trusted entirely to supple evasions and twists of body or turns of the horse to escape the enemy.

At the head of the Sebaa was a white-bearded warrior who made straight for Mijuel, and him Launce attacked at once with a circular parry, knocking the old fellow's point up and spitting him through the shoulder.

Then he dropped his lance, drew his keen scimitar, and felt at home as he dashed to and fro.

The contest was short and decisive. The Sebaa had overdriven their horses in the chase, and the animals were reeling with fatigue, while the Roala found the benefit of their brief rest.

In five minutes, notwithstanding the slight disparity in numbers, the little party of Sebaa were in full flight, having three of their number, among others the old chief, unborsed and wounded, while they fell back on their straggling comrades of the black and white horses, who had been left behind in the severe race.

But there was no ferocity in the treatment accorded to the wounded. Their mares and weapons were taken from them, but that was

all; and as the Roala raiders rode off, the old counselor Mijuel observed:

"The white boy sheik did not lie. He has handled his lance like a warrior, and the Sebaa mare is his."

CHAPTER V.

HORSE LORE.

LAUNCE was so overjoyed at the beautiful mare he had captured that he was riding away without asking any questions of her late owner, when Sotamm said:

"Ask him her breed, my brother. What value is a beautiful mare without a pedigree? Mere dirt. She may not be worth taking home."

Launce looked doubtful.

"He would not tell the truth, would he?"
Telaal looked hurt.

"No warrior of the Aneyza will lie about his mare. Ask him!"

She was a blood-red bay, with black points, a head of extraordinary beauty, and a symmetry of shape rarely found among Arabian horses.

Launce led her up to the wounded man, who sat on the ground gloomily stanching his bleeding shoulder, and asked:

"Oh, my father, can you tell me of what breed is the mare that Allah gave me?"

The old Arab looked up, and the tears were in his eyes as he answered:

"Oh, my lord, Allah has given you a treasure. Sherifa is Abeyeh Sherrak, and there is none like her among the mares of the Sebaa. Treat her well and she will carry you to the ends of the earth, and your children may ride on her back safely."

"Thanks, my father," replied the boy, and he rode away after his comrades, and told Telaal what the Sebaa had said as to the breed of the mare.

"Abeyeh Sherrak!" echoed Telaal, in a tone of delight. "Now, by Allah, my brother, this is a fortunate day. I have often heard of Sherifa. She is but four years old, and her dam, Hagar, was celebrated for her beauty, while her sire was Kehilan Ajuz."

Launce looked admiringly at the mare. Already the beautiful creature seemed to have recovered from the fatigue of excessive riding. The sweat was drying on her flanks, and she was snorting to clear her nostrils, as if ready for another four hours' gallop.

"Tell me, my brother," he said, "why you place such value on Sherifa, and what are your finest breeds of horses?"

Telaal looked at his brother.

"It is not our place to speak when white beards are beside us," he said, "our father Mijuel is a learned man in horses. Ask him."

Launce turned on the old Arab. They were ambling easily along now, and the camels had slackened their pace, while the Sebaa seemed to have quite given up the chase, for they were returning home with their wounded.

"Tell me, my father," he said, "what are your famous breeds of horses?"

Old Mijuel cleared his throat and began in the oracular style of an old Arab.

"Listen, my son. The Arab is the only man

that has a *war-horse*. All others are only fit for the plow. Our horses are the best in the world, and none can excel them. I have spoken."

"But your horses here, whence do they come?" persisted Launce.

Mijuel smiled.

"We have common horses—*Kadish*—and noble horses—*Hadud*. The *Kadish* are like Frank horses—who cares for them? The *Hadud* are ten breeds—five in the *Khamsa*—five outside; but all coming from the *Bintal Ahwaj*."

"And what is the *Khamsa*?" asked Launce, now much interested.

"The *Khamsa* is the stud of the Prophet of God, whose name is Mohammed. He collected the five famous breeds of the Kehilan, which belonged to his own tribe, the Koreish, and those five breeds are all in *El Khamsa*, or 'the Stable.' But there are five other breeds as good, of which the Prophet's tribe had none."

"And what are those five?"

"They are the Maneyghi, Saadan, Shueyman, Dakhman and the Jilfa Stam el Boulad."

"And these breeds, have they any others from them?"

"The Maneyghi has two—Maneyghi Slaji and Maneyghi Hedruj. The others have only one strain."

Launce drew a long breath.

"And *El Khamsa*—what are its breeds, my father?"

"Five breeds: Kehilan, Seglawi, Abeyan, Hamdani and Hadban. All these are in *El Khamsa*," was the Arab's reply.

"Abeyan!" echoed Launce. "Then my mare belongs to *El Khamsa*?"

Mijuel smiled and bowed.

"It is true. Abeyan has six strains, Abeyan Sherrak, Abeyan El Heddr, Abeyan Oudeha, Abeyan Dahwa, Abeyan Libdiz and Abeyan Hurmah; but Abeyan Sherrak is counted the best for beauty in all *Khamsa*."

"And for speed?" inquired Launce.

"The most noted for speed is Kehilan Ajuz: for Kehilan has forty breeds, of which Kehilan Ajuz is said to be the swiftest, though its mares are ewe-necked and long-legged. There are six breeds of Seglawi, of which Seglawi Sheyfi is the best."

Launce rode on thoughtfully for awhile, and at last said:

"And Franks think all Arab horses are alike. How little they know."

Mijuel's lip curled.

"The Franks have no horses. One of them sent a long-legged creature to Damascus. He called it a 'thoroughbred,' and truly it could run fast. But what of that? It could not run a hundred miles in a day on a few handfuls of barley as our horses can, and it had a head like a block of wood. No Arab would send his mare to such a *Kadish* as that. Bah!"

The old Arab seemed to be disgusted at the bare idea of breeding any of the Desert mares to a Frank horse; but Launce had heard something on the other side of the question for which old Mijuel was not prepared.

They rode along at a rapid, easy amble all that afternoon, driving the herd of three or four thousand camels before them, the Arabs, sensi-

ble that all danger was past, talking, laughing, and singing to each other as they rode. They were wonderfully elated at the success of their *ghazou*, but seemed to have no enmity against the Sebaa, and it was with a good deal of curiosity that Launce asked Mijuel:

"How comes it that the Roala and Sebaa are both Aneyza and yet at war with each other?"

CHAPTER VI.

A FAMILY QUARREL.

MIJUEL, thus appealed to, cleared his throat in the important fashion he usually affected and began:

"Roala is Aneyza and Sebaa is of the same family, but even brothers will quarrel when the Turk is there to set them at variance with each other. Our pasturage-grounds lie by the great river Euphrates and thither we go in the spring of each year. We cannot stop in one place over three days, for the camels and sheep eat up all the grass. In the winter we go to the South and stay in Arabia, for then the rains make the grass grow quickly, and we can stay seven days by one spring. I have said."

"But you have not told me what is the cause of your quarrel with the Sebaa," answered Launce, innocently, whereat Telaal and Sotamm burst out laughing and the first cried out:

"Tell the truth, oh Mijuel, for the young Frank is our brother. We stole a little march on the Sebaa and arrived at the pasture three days before them. And when they came we asked the Pasha of Bagdad for protection and he sent a regiment of soldiers to drive away Jedaan; that is all."

Launce looked puzzled.

"But who is Jedaan?" he asked.

Old Mijuel frowned and growled out:

"He is a dog and the son of a burnt father to try to rule over the Aneyza without being *Asil* himself."

Launce saw that there was some very hot personal spite somewhere, so he went on with his questions:

"What is *Asil* and why is Jedaan not *Asil*? Is he sheik of the Aneyza?"

Mijuel would not answer, but young Sotamm was more communicative.

"Jedaan, a few years ago, was a common Arab of the Sebaa, but he was so brave and skillful in war that they chose him war sheik of the whole Aneyza. My father grows old, but he is *Asil* or noble. His ancestors have never yet known the time when they did not kill a sheep every day to entertain the stranger. Such families are *Asil* and there are but seven in all Arabia of which my father and Faris of the Shammar are the only ones left in this part of the Hammad. The Sebaa are our cousins but we must fight them, to make them tired of Jedaan that we may become war chiefs ourselves."

And thus it proved to be as Launce found out from subsequent questioning.

An hour later they were threading their way in the last rays of sunset, through the vast herds of the Roala, and the fires were blazing in the midst of a huge crescent of tents when Sotamm said to Launce:

"Come, my brother; let us leave the camels

to Mijuel and our men. We will ride to my father's tent where doubtless our brother Shahlee has arrived."

The three Boy Bedouins shook their light halters, and their mares galloped off from the rest as gayly as if they had just come from a stable and good food, whereas they had been on the move for twenty-four hours or more, in all which time two or three pounds of barley and a pint of water had been their only sustenance. Soon they spied a fire of larger size than ordinary in front of a huge black tent, and Telaal cried to Launce:

"We are home at last, my brother; yonder is the tent of Sotamm."

Then came cries of joyful recognition, a crowd of Arabs dancing round their horses, and at last they came to the front of the great black tent, where stood in the doorway surrounded by Arabs in their best robes of honor, Sotamm ben Mijuel, the head sheik of the Roala, his arm resting on the shoulder of Charley Benton.

The shouts of welcome were shrill and piercing as the three Boy Bedouins leaped off their mares in front of the tent. Each as he pulled up stuck his spear into the sand, Bedouin fashion, and fastened his halter to the still quivering weapon as soon as he had dismounted.

Then Telaal and Sotamm ran forward, each with an arm round Launce's neck, and all three knelt down in the respectful fashion of young Arabs before their elders, at the feet of the great sheik.

Sotamm was a fine-looking Arab with a snowy beard, and made an imposing figure as he stood there in a robe of yellow silk, with a crimson cloak heavily embroidered with gold, his head shawl confined by a gold cord.

His voice was deep, rich and melodious as he said to them:

"Rise, my sons, you have all done well, and Sotamm is happy. Jedaan is the son of a burnt father, and the blood of Sotamm shall rule over the Aneyza, ere I die."

As the boys rose, he embraced his sons with marked affection, and said to Launce who came last:

"Welcome, son of my old friend. The son of Bentone Pasha is the son of Sotamm. You and mine own are brothers forever. Enter, and we will sup together. My young men shall take care of your mare."

Then Launce and Charley had time to greet each other, and a little later all were seated in the great tent on the sheik's carpet of honor, while a crowd of black slaves were busy carrying in enormous wooden platters, piled up with smoking pieces of boiled mutton, smothered in rice; huge heaps of the national *couscoussou*, a sort of paste made with corn meal and broth; with other piles of native truffles, found all over the Desert and used as a substitute for bread in the spring.

Launce was too hungry not to be able to do full justice to the meal; but he was fairly amazed at the performances of his brothers in arms, who attacked the feast like famished tigers.

That night, Launce, Charley, and all their friends slept under the shadow of the Roala encampment, with Arab musicians twanging two stringed guitars around the camp-fire outside

and singing interminable verses about the great deeds of *Antar the Brave*, the Arabian counterpart of *Jack the Giant Killer* and the *Seven Champions of Christendom* all rolled into one.

CHAPTER VII.

AMINA.

WHILE Launce Benton who had been in the saddle for twenty-four hours was completely tired out and slept heavily, his brother Charley, who had reached the Roala camp by another route in shorter time, under the guidance of Jumah, was too much interested in the sights round him to think of slumber.

He listened to the musicians sing the Lay of *Antar* and thought them a bore, though the Arabs round him seemed to be crazy with delight at hearing the often-told tale.

As soon as he could do it without being noticed, Charley slipped away into the crowd and began to explore the neighborhood of the sheik's tent.

He had, of course, seen no women as yet, for though the Arabs do not vail and seclude their women to the same extent as the Turks, yet every tent has its wall of division, behind which the women are safe from an intrusion.

Nevertheless Charley, wandering away among the tents, found himself all unawares in their rear, and was presently accosted by a soft voice, which asked him in Arabic:

"How did you get here, and who are you? Are you not Telaal's brother Shahlee?"

Charley stared in amazement at the figure before him.

It was that of a young girl, nearly as fair as himself, with *golden hair and blue eyes*, albeit dressed in Arab costume.

Her shapely arms were bare to the shoulder, but loaded with bracelets, and gleamed white in the faint light of the fires glowing through the tents. Her feet and ankles were also naked, save for heavy gold bangles, and her sole garment was a narrow shirt of blue silk, coming to midleg and girt with a Persian shawl. Her hair was braided in long plaits and strung with gold coins into a very bewitching head-dress, and altogether Charley had never seen such a lovely being in his life?

He could only stammer:

"I had lost my way. Yes, I am Shahlee. But who are you?"

The girl smiled so as to show her white teeth and replied:

"Have you not heard Telaal speak of Amina? I am his sister Amina, and yours, too."

Charley could hardly answer; he was so much overcome with the beauty of this wonderful Amina.

"No," he said at last. "Telaal never said a word about you. Then you are my sister and embrace me—is it not so Amina?"

She laughed merrily, and her laugh was echoed by a little chorus of giggles close by, at which Charley blushed furiously, for he had not dreamed he was under so close a watch. A moment later, out of the vast black tent in the rear of which he was, lifting the flaps, peeping out, a few creeping into the open, came a score of Arab girls, all in the same costume as

Amina, but without her appearance of richness.

They came dancing up to Charley and began to examine his clothing with a minuteness and curiosity that made them quite oblivious of their politeness.

"Oh what funny clothes!" cried the girls in chorus. "They are not fastened to him: they don't grow there. They are real clothes."

Charley was embarrassed, but he hid his annoyance before Amina and continued to her:

"I am glad to have seen my sister. Is she the daughter of Sotamm?"

"Of course," was the reply. "Whose else should I be?"

"But how is it that you have blue eyes and a white skin while my brothers are dark?"

Amina smiled and then sighed as she said:

"My mother was a Circassian and it is from her I derive my fair face. Telaal's mother was Fatima *bint Ibrahim*, so he is dark."

"And Sotamm's mother?"

"Sotamm's mother was Aicha *bint* [daughter of] *Alkader*. Mine and his are dead, but Fatima still lives."

"Then Sotamm had three wives?" said Charley inquisitorily at which she retorted:

"And why not? The Prophet allows each tried believer four, and in our land we all agree together. But they tell me that you Christians only have one wife."

"Certainly; but we love her better than your people can love so many."

Amina sighed slightly and then laughed.

"Go away," she said, "I have never seen a Frank before, but they tell me that they are all bad men."

"We are not Franks but Americans," Charley replied.

"Americans! what are they? I never heard of them before."

Charley tried to explain the difference between Franks and Americans but had made no great progress when they heard a shrill voice from the interior of the tent calling out:

"Amina, Amina, come in. Are you not ashamed to talk to the Sidi [gentleman] with your face uncovered?"

Amina hastily blew a kiss to Charley and ran into the tent while the young American slowly retraced his steps to the front of the tent where he found the musicians still telling a circle of squatting Arabs all about the glories of Antar.

The boy slowly entered the tent and sought his couch to dream of Amina all night long.

It seemed to him in his sleep as if he heard distant shouts and Amina clung to his arms crying:

"The Sebaa are coming, Shablee. Save me from the Sebaa, or they will kill us all."

The noise in his dream grew louder and louder till he suddenly started up upon his elbow broad awake.

It was no dream. The tent was empty, women were shrieking and men shouting:

"THE SEBAA! THE SEBAA!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

It was too true. The Roala camp was being attacked by the Sebaa, and the attack was a

complete surprise. The great tent of Sheik Sotamm was empty, and a fierce fight was going on outside, while the shrieks that came from the women's compartment showed that there was fear among them, if nothing else.

With the instinct of brotherhood Charley looked round for Launce, but his brother had disappeared.

His rifle and pistols were beside him and in a moment more he had snatched them up and run out of the tent.

Outside there was no light but that of the stars, the fires having faded away, and a dark mass of struggling figures filled the whole area of the encampment.

Presently it came swaying toward the tent, and Charley took his stand in the doorway to defend himself if foes were on the outskirts of the battle.

He did not dare to fire yet, for fear of hurting his friends, but presently he had no more doubts.

The war-cry of the Sebaa came from the nearest horsemen, and Charley opened fire with his Winchester rifle into the midst of the dark mass.

The effect was instantaneous, for up to that time no shots had been fired by the Arabs.

There was a wild cry of rage and terror, and then the whole mass of horsemen came tearing down on Sheik Sotamm's great tent, upsetting it on the heads of some and riding over others.

Then came a dismal scream from the apartments of the women; Charley found himself knocked down and buried in a sea of black goats-hair tent cloth, and over him rushed a wave of horsemen.

Five minutes after, the camp was empty of foes, huge fires were blazing, and Charley was crawling out of the wreck of the big tent, battered and bruised, but with whole bones, while the violent struggles of another part of the mass showed where three of the Sebaa raiders had been caught in the fallen tent, horse and all, and were now striving vainly to get out.

The attack was over and Jedaan had paid the Roala back in their own coin, with interest.

Instead of a *ghazou* of twenty horsemen, he had come in on the Roala with a couple of hundred spears, swept off half their camels and a third of their sheep, killed two Roala warriors and wounded near a score more, and all that the Roala had to show for their defense were the three Sebaa cavaliers caught in the fall of the tent, and five wounded men, all of whom had succumbed to the rapid fire of Charley Benton's repeater.

It was a sad and sorrowful crowd of Arabs that gathered in the light of early dawn round the sheik's tent and helped to raise it again.

As the sun rose, Charley Benton saw his Arab brother Telaal, his head tied up, and his right arm bandaged, coming toward him.

"Alas, my brother!" was all the boy could say, and then he broke down and sobbed.

Charley looked around anxiously.

"Where is Sotamm? Where is Launce?" he asked with trembling lips.

Telaal straightened up proudly.

"Where warriors should be, on the trail of the enemy. Is the Roala a swine to root in the

dirt? Jedaan will pay for this before to-morrow."

At this moment a loud shriek of fear and anguish went up from the women's tent, in the midst of which Charley caught the name "Amina" frequently repeated.

Full of anxiety, he rushed over to the tent, and there made the discovery that Jedaan, in his last rush, besides carrying off the flocks of the Roala, had snatched up Amina, with several more of Satamm's harem, on the horses of his warriors, and carried them away to the tents of the Sebaa.

Now, indeed, was there rage and consternation in the Roala camp. Old Sotamm tore his beard and cursed the wicked Jedaan, ordering out all his men that remained to pursue the ravisher.

Charley Benten, pale as a ghost, with his eyes gleaming, came to the old sheik and cried out:

"Give me a mare, my father, and I promise you that I will bring back Amina unharmed, or kill the wicked Jedaan with my own hand. I struck three Sebaa only to-night."

The old man embraced him joyfully.

"You are worthy to be the son of Bentone Pasha," he cried, "and you shall have my own mare, Hamania. She is Kehilet Ajuz, and will carry you like the wind."

Charley waited for no more, for it seemed to him as if his heart were afire, and he hastily gathered together his store of ammunition and had the old sheik's mare saddled for him, for he did not believe in riding on a Bedouin pad. He needed the steady support of the deep Moorish saddle and broad stirrups to enable him to use his rifle and pistols as he knew how to use them, and it was with a dangerous look on his young face that the third Boy Bedouin set off from camp on the trail of the pursuers of Jedaan, half an hour after the carrying off of Amina.

He realized that he loved the Arab maid better than a sister.

CHAPTER IX.

A SOLDIER OF FORTUNE.

THE sun was high in the heavens over the Syrian Desert, and the flowers were beginning to droop in its rays when Ibrahim ben Achmet, sheik of the Achmet branch of the Sebaa, sitting on his tall *deloul*, or riding dromedary, on his usual round to look after his flocks, spied a huge cloud of dust coming from the south.

He immediately struck the *deloul* with his camel stick and put it into a sharp trot while he called to his sons:

"Up and gird your loins. Ride to the Beni Akbar and Solali and tell them that Jedaan is coming back with the Roala hard after him. He needs succor."

Away went the boys on their fleet mares and *delouls* and great was the scurrying to and fro amid the dust for the next hour, at the end of which time down came a regular tempest of frightened sheep, goats and camels, driving in the flocks of the Sebaa to the common center of the camp, and closely followed by a number of horsemen, whose animals were covered with sweat.

In the distance behind them came another crowd of horsemen nearly twice as large evi-

dently in pursuit, and Ibrahim ben Achmet lighted the match of his long musket with a flint and steel and said to himself:

"Now we shall have a good fight with these sons of burnt fathers, if we can hold them till our cousins get up."

Ibrahim ben Achmet belonged to a family of the Sebaa that had been unfortunate in former wars and had lost all their mares, so that they were compelled to ride camels and use clumsy matchlocks if they hoped to roam the desert longer.

As soon as the herds were once safe in the precincts of the general camp the Sebaa horsemen halted as if to form for a defense, but the Roalas did not ride on headlong and so invite defeat.

Ibrahim ben Achmet rode forward to join his friends, and was met at once by a short, thick-set Arab, with a face very deeply scarred by small-pox, and altogether meanly dressed, though he was mounted on a powerful chestnut mare.

Yet it was to this mean-looking Arab that Ibrahim ben Achmet, who was *Asil* or noble to the tips of his fingers, bowed with great respect and asked:

"Has my lord Jedaan any orders for the battle? I have sent for our friends."

Jedaan—for it was that desert-famed soldier of fortune—shook his head in a nervous, impatient way, and said:

"None, except to fight. I have taught those boys a lesson, and they will not charge in a hurry. Make your camel kneel and try them with a shot. They shall see that Jedaan is not asleep."

The *parvenu* chief of the Aneyza was as cool as a cucumber, and rode at a foot pace up and down his line forming his warriors, though the Roalas twice as strong as himself were making ready to attack.

In the midst of his men were the captive Roala girls, including Amina, tied behind Sebaa cavaliers, and these the war sheik of the Aneyza ordered off to the rear.

This reduced his fighting force to about a hundred and eighty spears, which he spread out in a thin skirmish line.

Ibrahim ben Achmet gave a short guttural click with his tongue, under which his camel knelt down in front of the line, when he leveled his matchlock, with its seven-foot barrel, and sent a bullet into the midst of the foe.

A moment later out of the Roala ranks dashed two figures on beautiful bay mares, at sight of which Jedaan smote his breast, looking alarmed for the first time, and ejaculating:

"Franks with their guns. We are undone."

The two riders were not Arabs, for they wore a sort of half-Turkish costume, and both carried rifles.

They did not seem, however, to be immediately hostile in their purpose, for they rode up to the Sebaa line without attempting to shoot, when one of them called out:

"A parley, oh, Jedaan! Sebaa and Roala are brothers. Why should they kill each other when there are Turks?"

Jedaan made a signal to his men to keep back, while he rode out alone armed only with lance and sword to meet the two Franks.

"If the Roala are our brothers why did they steal my camels?" he asked, "and why do they ask the Turks to help them against Jedaan?"

Charley Benton—for it was Launce and himself that had come forward—retorted with a counter question:

"Why has Jedaan made war on women? Is Sotamm's daughter a warrior that she should be carried off a prisoner?"

"My tent is lonely and I need a wife," was the cynical reply.

The hot blood rushed to Charley's face as he listened to the taunt, and he cried out, angrily:

"If Jedaan lays on Amina so much as a finger of insult, he dies the death of a dog. Give her up at once, or we fight."

He had come over intending to me liate, but his love had deprived him of his usual calmness, and it was the usually impetuous Launce who said:

"Hold on, Charley; hold on. Don't get into a passion, or you won't get the girl. Leave him to me."

Jedaan had only curled his lip at the violent threat of the boy, but Launce broke the serenity of his composure by saying, coolly:

"Jedaan is a great rider, they say. Will he fight me for the girl with lance and sword alone?"

The Arab warrior actually started at the apparently impudent proposal. Then he laughed.

"Fight you? Yes, and the other, too."

CHAPTER X.

A DUEL AND A RACE.

LAUNCE had heard that Jedaan was counted the best horseman in the whole confederation of the Aneyza, and very vain of his prowess, or he would not have made such a proposition.

As a rule the Bedouins of the Hammad, riding on a thick pad without stirrups, are somewhat insecure in their seats.

To a rider in a Turkish or Mexican saddle, whose seat is absolutely secure in the midst of the horse's back, it is a matter of comparative ease to unhorse a man who uses the barebacked seat, and Launce had changed to his own saddle as soon as he got to the camp of Sotamm.

He felt tolerably secure of being able to beat Sedaan, and wished to give him a lesson not to despise Yankee boys. Moreover, being quite cool—for Launce was not in love with Amina—he knew that there was no chance of regaining the girl unless he could engage Jedaan's honor to restore her.

And he knew that an Arab never breaks his pledged word.

"It is good," said Launce. "I will fight you, Jedaan, here and now. I will put away my pistols and gun, and take lance and sword alone. If I overthrow you, Amina shall be given back to her father; if you can slay me, let the battle go on."

Jedaan laughed scornfully.

"If a boy like you can overthrow the war sheik of the Aneyza, I will give up Amina and confess I am dirt. It is good. I have spoken."

Without another word Launce handed his pistols to Charley, who stuck them in his belt and slung Launce's rifle at his back.

Then Launce shook his long spear, wheeled his mare to take distance, and cried out to Jedaan:

"Come on!"

The Arab sheik spoke to the chestnut mare, and flew to meet Launce, who shook Sherifa's bridle and leveled his spear.

Jedaan was a good rider for an Arab of the Hammad, but he had not the seat of the Turkish saddle nor the arts of fence of Europe.

His point was whirled aside by that of the American boy, and Launce struck him across the face with the shaft of his weapon.

In another minute they were past each other, wheeling to renew the onset, when Launce raised his long spear, a trick taught him by a Frenchman, and brought the point down on Jedaan's shoulder, knocking him half off the horse.

"With an angry cry of "Sheitan" [Satan], the Arab dropped his lance, drew his sword and closed in on the American.

But here of all places Launce was at home. He knew every turn of the saber, and met the wide blows of the Arab with cool parries, till he too closed in, and with a turn of his wrist slashed Jedaan across the forehead, blinding him with streaming blood.

Almost at the same minute he gave the sheik's foot a tip with his own toe, following it up with a blow of the pommel of his sword in the face, and there lay Jedaan in the dust, while the Roala raised a wild yell of delight, and the Sebaa began to wheel their horses to flee.

In another moment a stampede might have ensued, when it was stayed by the arrival of a fresh band of Sebaa, numbering a hundred horsemen who came up shouting their war-song, and caused the Roala to halt.

Jedaan scrambled up from the ground and dashed the blood from his eyes, crying:

"It is enough. Take the girl. I have spoken."

Charley and Launce galloped away, leading Jedaan's mare, so as not to be surprised, and met the young Sotamm and old Mijuel, who anxiously demanded:

"Will the son of a burnt father give up our women, or is it war to the death?"

"He has promised to give up Amina," said Launce, cheerily; and, sure enough, not ten minutes later, an Arab rode out with the girl behind his saddle, and called out to the Roala:

"Take your sheik's daughter and go away. Why should there be strife?"

Sotamm dashed up to him and snatched Amina from him, saying angrily:

"Back to Jedaan, and tell him that the sons of Sotamm are no fools. Our father is the sheik of the Aneyza, and Jedaan is a burnt dog."

The Sebaa looked surprised at the violent language, but he made no reply, and the young Roala carried his sister back to her friends, when he said to Launce:

"My brother, you won her; it is your place to take her back. Jedaan's mare is yours. Let Amina ride her."

Launce looked at the Sebaa and shook his head.

"Let that task be for my brother," he said. "I will be in the fight with the Sebaa."

In fact, he knew only too well what was the matter with his brother, and wished to give Charley a chance to be happy.

Charley flushed with pleasure and gratitude as he muttered to Launce:

"Thank you, old fellow. I'll not forget this."

Then he placed Amina on the powerful chestnut mare, and the two lovers rode off together into the Desert, for it was evident that the Roala were likely to have a severe fight, and it was no place for a girl.

As for Launce Benton, he was now quite in his element. Three days in the Desert had made him feel at home, and the superiority of his armament made him the master of any single Bedouin that should attack him.

He could see single horsemen and strings of others coming in from all the tribes of the Sebaa to join the fight, but on the other hand he knew that the Roala were all out by this time, and coming up in force to the help of their young chief.

It was Jedaan against the Boy Bedouins now; who would beat?

As he thought of this Launce looked back, saw a cloud of dust on the southern horizon; heard the war-cry raised by Sotamm, and in another minute was galloping ahead of the charging Arabs, firing his revolver at the Sebaa, who fled at their coming.

He noticed Jedaan, with a white cloth round his forehead, mounted on a fresh mare, a gray; and saw that he was trying to draw the Roala forward into the camp of the Sebaa.

He waved his hand to Sotamm, who understood the signal, and the charge ceased.

No sooner did Jedaan see it than he wheeled his men with a shrill cry and returned to the fight.

Launce, with a coolness that did him infinite credit, leaped off his mare, turned her sidewise to the enemy, and began to fire rapidly over the saddle with his repeating-rifle, sending his bullets in among the advancing Arabs, who swerved in dismay from the amazing spectacle of a gun that fired forever, to all appearance.

Then they gathered at a distance as if to make a final charge, and Launce heard a great shout behind him. Looking round, he saw the Roala reinforcements coming, and his brother Charley rode at their head.

CHAPTER XI. DESERT CHIVALRY.

Now, indeed, it seemed as if war were about to begin in earnest. Old Sotamm himself, on a white *deloul*, armed with a long gun of Turkish manufacture, had come up with the reinforcements of his tribe, had sent his daughter home under escort, and invited Charles to come back to the battle.

On the other side, Jedaan, who seemed to have more personal influence over his warriors than the stately Sotamm, was flying to and fro on his gray mare, forming the men into a long line.

The Desert seemed to be divided into two vast clouds of dust, amid which careering Arabs galloped to and fro, making their spears quiver till they bent nearly double, shouting out fierce de-

fiances to each other, but as yet coming no nearer to blows. Charley, who had often heard from his father descriptions of battles, began to wonder at all this noise about nothing, and asked Mijuel:

"What is the matter? Why do we not charge?"

Old Mijuel stroked his beard as he said:

"They are our cousins and of our blood. We do not want to fight them as we would the Shammar. Let them pay the *Thar* and put down Jedaan, and we are all content."

And indeed, after half an hour's shouting and galloping, both sides seemed to be as far off from fighting as before, while the noise gradually subsided, till the rival tribes of Arabs stood staring at each other.

As soon as the lull came, it was Jedaan who showed himself to be the master of the situation, not the elder Sotamm.

He rode out on his gray mare, with his spear held aloft, halted midway between the tribes, stuck the weapon into the ground, and beckoned to the other side, as if to invite a parley.

Young Sotamm turned to his father in an imploring way, as if to ask permission to go out, but the old sheik shook his head.

"Let the American sons of my friend go and find what Jedaan wants," he said shrewdly. "The man will respect them, for they are Franks, if they are boys."

Launce and Charley willingly consented to go, the more so that they were beginning to have a decided admiration for Jedaan.

"Tell him," were Sotamm's instructions, "that he has killed three Roalas and has wounded more, for which he must pay the *Thar*. He must also give back all our women and the flocks that he captured from us, or we fight."

The Boy Bedouins rode out to where Jedaan sat like a statue on his horse and saluted him politely.

"Peace be unto you," was Jedaan's reply.

"There is peace between the Sebaa and the Franks. Why do I find you with my enemies? You are the sons of Bentone Pacha, and your father is my friend. Why are you with Sotamm?"

Launce was a little confused at this grave address; but Charley replied:

"Sotamm truly is our father's friend, but I never heard him speak of you, oh sheik. We are with Sotamm because we have sworn brotherhood with his sons, Telaal and Sotamm."

Jedaan curled his lip under his beard.

"Telaal and Sotamm are not men."

"You are men and can fight like men. Why should you cling to that dried-up and withered tree, old Sotamm. You should be on our side among men; for I can give you mares such as the Prophet desired to mount and could not, and make you chiefs of the Desert."

Launce checked him with a gesture.

"For shame, Jedaan, would you have us turn traitors to our salt."

Jedaan bowed as if he felt the rebuke.

"Then let us all have peace. I am tired of this war. Let the Roala state their terms of peace."

Charley told him; the abdication of Jedaan,

restoration of captures and payment of the *Thar*.

Jedaan smiled.

"The *Thar* we will pay; the captures are our own, as your captures are yours. You took three thousand camels from us. Keep them. We will pay only the *Thar*. As for myself, the Aneyza have chosen me to be their war chief, and it is not mine to decline. They will not have Sotamm. Tell him that, and God be with you."

He bowed again, plucked up his spear and wheeled his horse to go back, while the Americans took the terms offered to Sotamm, who grumbled a good deal but finally accepted them, much to the disgust of young Sotamm.

As Charley Benton was about to ride back to Jedaan, the young Arab galloped out in front of both armies and called out to the Sebaa chief:

"Jedaan has lied to the world when he said that Sotamm is a boy. Here he is, and he defies the Sheik of the Sebaa to run a course."

This defiance was so exactly in the Arab spirit that it produced a simultaneous yell of approval from both parties, and Jedaan cantered out to meet his youthful antagonist, crying:

"Where is this boy that defies Jedaan? Is he weary of his life that he courts my spear? Let him advance."

In another moment the young Bedouin had dashed at him and the two were hotly engaged in a regular Arab contest, wheeling and dodging, tilting at each other and then throwing themselves over the horse's side to escape the thrust of the opponent's lance. Jedaan was a good horseman, but his mare was not equal to that of young Sotamm, which was *Kehileh Messeneh*, a breed much esteemed for suppleness.

In a contest with equal horses the strength and experience of the older Arab would have been too much for the boy; but the difference in horseflesh and the light weight of young Sotamm made things more even.

He circled round Jedaan, evaded all his assaults, and finally the great war sheik of the Aneyza was compelled to remain on the defensive, watching his chance.

It came after a little, as young Sotamm, growing bolder with impunity, rushed in to close. Jedaan, remembering the very trick Launce Benton had played on him, raised his lance in the air and brought it down on the boy's shoulder, knocking him off his mare into the dust.

But even there Sotamm was too quick to be defeated. He jumped up like a flash, dodged under his mare's belly to escape Jedaan's spear, and in a moment had his keen sword out, cutting at the hand which the Sebaa chief had stretched out to grasp the mare's halter.

Jedaan saw the blow coming and escaped it, but he could not catch the active mare, which wheeled round and kicked so violently at him that the Sebaa was fain to allow Sotamm to scramble up again in peace.

Then he held up his lance and cried out:

"It is enough. Sotamm is a boy, but he is worthy to be called a warrior. When Jedaan dies, he is worthy to be the war sheik of the Aneyza."

His words were echoed with a shout of enthusiastic applause from all the Arabs present, and the feud between Sotamm and Jedaan seemed to be at an end from that moment.

Nothing is indeed more remarkable among the Bedouins of the Syrian Desert than the traces of chivalric generosity which they show in their wars with each other. Over a point of honor they will fight fiercely, but death is uncommon in their wars, and there seems to be no animosity of feeling between the parties to a battle, either before or after the contest.

An hour later, Old Sotamm, his son, the two Americans and Mijuel, were all seated under the dark folds of the great tent of Jedaan, discussing the details of peace over pipes and coffee, while Jedaan proposed an alliance between young Sotamm and his own daughter Fatima.

CHAPTER XII.

A REVELATION.

THREE days later the whole of the vast tribes of the Aneyza had moved into summer quarters by the banks of the Euphrates, and the Sebaa and Roala were at peace together. The encampment covered the country for a space nearly forty miles in length and twenty in breadth, so that wherever one turned his eyes nothing was to be seen but the flocks, herds and tents of the Aneyza.

It was market-time now, and the Aneyza were busy trading for corn, when Jedaan came to the Benton boys one day and beckoned them into his tent to hold a private talk.

The war sheik of the Aneyza looked troubled and disturbed, and opened his business without the usual palaver.

"My young brothers are friends of the Aneyza, and have influence with the Turks. Their father is a great sheik from beyond the seas, and the Pasha will listen to him. Do my brothers know Dervish Pasha?"

They had heard of him as one of the hardest fighters in the Russian war, and as having been recently made Governor of Mesopotamia, with quarters at Bagdad.

"It is true. Dervish Pasha is governor, and he wants us to come in and submit to him, or he will send troops against us."

"Then why do you not move away? He can never catch you in the Desert," was Launce's suggestion.

"That is true, when we have bought our corn of the Jebours; but Dervish Pasha knows that it has been a hard winter, and that we are short of corn, which will not be ready for us for a month; for the harvest is late."

"Then what do you want us to do?" asked Charley Benton, who saw that some request was coming.

Jedaan hesitated. He seemed unwilling to speak his desires. At last he said:

"Do you know Faris?"

They had both heard of him as a young chief lately arrived at the head of the Shammar tribes of Bedouins. They had in fact a letter to him from their father, but had forbore to speak of it, knowing the old feud between the Shammar and Aneyza.

"Yes," said Charley, slowly, "we know Faris."

Jedaan hesitated; but at last said, in a hard, abrupt way:

"Will you take a letter to Faris from me? We are kinsmen after all, and the Turk is an enemy."

"We shall be very glad, if the letter is one of peace," replied Charley.

"It is a letter of peace, yes," was the hurried reply; and then Jedaan seemed to be relieved and dashed into his subject.

"You see, we Arabs are as children and know nothing. We quarrel with each other, and while we quarrel, the Turk possesses the land. Faris has a brother, Ferhan, who has submitted to the Turks, who have made him a pasha, and the Shammar are split into two parties. Some have given up their horses and turned laborers, so that the rest are afraid of the Pasha of Bagdad. When I was a boy it was very different. We kept the Turks in their towns, and the Arab roamed where he pleased. Now the Turks have divided us and rule us. It is time this were stopped."

"Very good," replied Charley. "Tell us what to do, and we will do it."

"Go to Faris with a letter from me. Tell him the Aneyza wish to make peace with the Shammar, if only for this summer that we may both fight the Turk. After all, we are all brothers, we Arabs."

"When you give us the letter we will take it," answered Charley; "but you must help us in what we came for."

"And what is that?" asked Jedaan.

Charley told him the object of their quest, and added:

"My brother has won a mare who is Abeyeh Sherrak, and that is all; for Sotamm has kept your mare, and we could not ask it of him, as we are brothers to his sons."

Jedaan laughed.

"I thought you would find the old fox out. He is a miser who covets wealth, and the Aneyza will not have him for a chief. You will never see that mare again. But comfort yourselves, for she was but *Shueyman Shah*, and had a stiff hock from an old cut. Who rode her away?"

"The sheik's daughter, Amina," replied Launce for his brother. "After we had saved her he took her away, and we have not seen her since."

Jedaan smiled slightly.

"Amina? Yes, I have heard of her. She is not his daughter at all."

In a moment both boys had started up, pale with excitement.

"Not his daughter? Who then?"

"Have you Franks no eyes not to see she is no daughter of Sotamm? Do our girls have blue eyes and white skins? Does their hair shine like gold?" asked Jedaan sarcastically.

"I know all that," interposed Charley breathlessly. "But she told me her mother was a Circassian."

Jedaan laughed scornfully.

"Circassians are for Pashas, not for Arabs. What would a Circassian do in our black huts? I tell you this girl's father never lived in the Desert, and her mother was a Turkish woman who died of the plague in Bagdad."

"Then in that case, Launce," said Charley with compressed lips, in English, "it is our duty to rescue Amina from the hands of the Arabs. It is horrible to think of her married to one of them."

Launce nodded, and Jedaan continued:

"The child was the daughter of a Frank merchant who lived in Bagdad, and when her mother died the father was taking the little one to Aleppo, when he was killed by Sotamm's men, who took the child to the barem tent. I was but a simple warrior then; but I know it all. She wears an amulet on her neck which comes from the land of the Franks."

"Then that will probably give us a clew to her identity," exclaimed Charley.

"Say no more, Jedaan. We will take your letter to Faris. And you, on your part, will help us to recover Amina, and secure the horses we want."

"On my head be it," was the Arab's reply. "Jedaan never forgets a friend. Let Faris help me with the Turk, and you may ask what you wish of me."

CHAPTER XIII.

FARIS.

BETWEEN the Euphrates and the Tigris lies the home of the Shammar Bedouins, all the way up to the Sinjar hills; and here, a few days later, Faris, chief of the Shammar, sat in his tent door, looking out over the flowering expanse of the desert.

Faris was a remarkably handsome young Arab of medium size, with a lithe, active frame, and an eye like a hawk's, while his dress showed him to be a sheik of distinction. He wore in his sash a pair of ivory-handled revolvers, given him by an English lord, who had traveled in that country a few years before, and his favorite mares, ten in number, stood before the tent.

In the shadow of the doorway, on a row of cushioned stands, were seven hawks, fastened by their jesses, but unhooded; for Faris was a devoted falconer, who loved his birds as well as his mares.

Besides his hawks and mares, Faris was proud of his slender Persian greyhounds, of which nearly a dozen lay about in the tent.

The young sheik was in that listless, dreamy mood of happiness so common to Orientals, as he lay back on the carpets and looked over the landscape.

As far as the eye could see—and that was about twenty miles over the flat desert—the land was dotted with flocks of sheep and camels, all his own, or belonging to his tribe.

Clumps of black tents showed the abiding-place of outlying bands of Shammar, and a crescent of tents stretched from his own for half a mile on either side.

Faris was quite happy, and so was his nephew, Telaal ben Mijuel, a boy of seventeen, who lay not far off.

Faris was smoking a chibouque, and was roused from his dreamy reverie by the voice of his favorite nephew, saying:

"Strangers are coming, oh, brother of my father; and they are Franks from Bagdad. They have camels loaded with boxes."

Faris looked out among the flocks and herds

and saw what his nephew had indicated, a little train of dots far away, moving toward the Shammar camp.

"They will be welcome," he said, lazily. "I love the Franks if they are like my English brother. He was a man to lean on."

They lay watching the slow coming of the moving dots till they could clearly make out a dozen horsemen with eight loaded camels, and then Telaal said:

"Two are Franks, but the others are men of the Aneyza. What does that mean?"

Faris smiled to himself.

"It is because Dervish Pasha is so hard on the Aneyza that they wish to make peace with us. Be it so. We Arabs are brothers, but for all that, Jedaan and Sotamm must make a fair division of pasture before we can help them."

The young sheik was already a cool and calculating politician, and had been expecting a message from Jedaan for some days. In fact, Faris himself, being on good terms with Dervish Pasha, had been the first to suggest to the veteran that if he ever hoped to control the Bedouin tribes west of Euphrates, he could have no better opportunity than when they were tied up, as it were, to the river villages, for corn.

For a month or more the Aneyza could not move far, and if ever the troops could get near them, now was the time.

And in so doing Faris had not the least idea of helping Dervish Pasha.

He only wanted to draw him into a trap, and compel Jedaan to make peace with the Shammar.

"Go tell the young men to get out their mares and welcome the strangers," he said. "Let a sheep be killed at once."

Telaal ben Mijuel disappeared to obey the order, and Faris lazily watched the nearer approach of the strangers, till they had come within half a mile of his tent, when he sprung up as if laziness were a thing unknown to him, ran to one of his mares, sprung on her back, and rode away at a stretching gallop, followed by hundreds of warriors, all yelling together.

From the brandishing of spears and the firing of guns and pistols it seemed for a time as if Pandemonium had broken loose, but Launce and Charley Benton, who were indeed leading the approaching cavalcade, took no notice of the tumult save to ask:

"Where is Faris?"

When Faris himself came up he leaped off his horse, an example imitated by the Americans; when the young Arab said:

"Ye are welcome, sons of the Frank. I, too, have heard of your nation and of Bentone Pasha, though I never saw him. You are welcome to the tents of the Shammar."

Then they embraced each other and once more mounted, riding on to the tent of Faris, where the dogs barked, hawks screamed, and slaves came running out to hold their stirrups.

Then Faris led them into his tent which had been furnished up till it looked very handsome; made them sit down on the soft, bright-hued Persian carpets; ordered pipes and coffee, and introduced all the great warriors of the Sham-

mar, who came and bowed themselves before the two American boys as if they had been kings.

There were Sotamms and Farises, Telaals and Mijuels without number; for these are favorite names among Bedouins; with Ganims and Beders, Hassans and Harouns, till all the Arabian Nights seemed to be passing in review, and there was a shower of Arabian compliments, with a courtesy and cordiality that neither of the boys had experienced among the Aneyza.

When at last they looked tired, Faris clapped his hands and made a signal that he wished to be alone, when the tent emptied as quickly as it had filled, and Faris said:

"My house and all in it are yours, and you are my brothers; for I am the friend of the Franks. One of them gave me this."

He showed them his ivory-handled revolver, and looked with great interest at their weapons, which they exhibited to him.

Then he said:

"The sheep is slain, and will be ready in a little while. Till then we are at liberty to talk alone. You come from Jedaan. I trust my brother enjoys good health, for Jedaan is my friend. He is a warrior worthy to lead Arabs, though he be not *Asil*. But in God's sight all men are brothers."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TREATY.

THE sun was about half-way over the horizon next morning when the Shammar camp was all astir, for Faris and his guests were going out on a hawking expedition.

Since he had first mentioned the name of Jedaan as his friend the young sheik had not spoken a word of business to them; for Faris was the very soul of hospitality and made his guests feel that they could do just as they wished.

Naturally they hesitated to talk business to a young prince of the Desert, whose thoughts seemed to be concentrated on nothing but pleasure, and when Launce had idly expressed a wish to see the hawks of the Shammar chief flown, Faris had thrown himself into the idea with an eagerness that seemed to preclude all idea of policy on his part.

They already liked him better than either Sotamm the elder or Jedaan; for he was nearer their own age, being about twenty-six, and entered into all their ideas without the stately reserve of the older Arabs or the headlong gayety of young Telaal and Sotamm, who were mere children in intellect when off a *ghazou*.

When the sun rose and they all rode out, Faris was in his element, with his hawk, Sabok, on his wrist and his dogs jumping round him, while he rode on a beautiful bay mare, which he said Jedaan had given him.

"And why did Jedaan give you the mare?" asked Launce, curiously.

Faris smiled as he answered:

"I was on a *ghazou*, and we met the Aneyza and beat them till Jedaan came up. And it was my fortune to wound five Aneyza that day, till one of them shot my mare dead. Then my party were obliged to retire, while I mounted behind my nephew, Telaal, who is but a light

weight. And it pleased Jedaan, who is a warrior himself, to send after me Haroun ben Abdallah, leading this mare, with a message."

Here he stopped, and Charley asked:

"What was the message, Faris?"

The young Arab colored through his dark skin as he answered proudly but modestly:

"He said that Faris was too good a warrior to ride double, and he begged me to take a present of his mare, which was Kehilan Ajuz. Jedaan may not be *Asil*, my brothers, but he is worthy to lead warriors. I have never led a *ghazou* against the Sebaa since."

"But the Roala?" asked Launce. "Are they not as noble as the Sebaa?"

Faris bowed his head.

"They are good men; but Sotamm is so proud of his noble blood that he thinks he can go to sleep over it. I have not seen his sons, but they tell me that they are different."

"Very different," answered Launce, in his warmest tones. "They are our brothers."

And he told Faris how they had first met, and gave him a history of the *ghazou* and of the way Jedaan had taken his revenge therefor.

Faris listened attentively and then said:

"They will make good warriors in time, but they are not Jedaan. You have heard how he came to be made chief of the band?"

"No," said both boys. "Tell us."

"It was twenty years ago, when I was a child," began Faris, "that the Turks came down by surprise on the Sebaa, and undertook to compel them to give up their horses and arms and till the soil like the common Jebours. The great Omar Pasha had ordered it, and had sent down a brigade of infantry with six brass cannon, which marched by night and caught the Sebaa in the act of crossing the Euphrates. The Turkish commander ordered his guns to open on the Arabs, and many camels and sheep were drowned in the river, while the Aneyza hurried off to the Desert. In the midst of the confusion, when all seemed lost, and it was certain that a large part of the Aneyza would be cut off from crossing, a party of ten horsemen on the other bank recrossed the stream and rode straight for the Turkish guns, Jedaan at the head.

"The Turks thought they had come in to offer surrender, and the general, whose name was Halil Bey, rode down to meet them and offer them terms. But no sooner did Jedaan see that the guns had stopped firing, than he charged on them like a flash, speared all the gunners, drove the fugitives on Halil Bey, ran the general through the body with his lance, and then spiked every gun himself before the Turks had recovered from their panic. The end was that the infantry broke in disorder under the charge of the men, and that Jedaan was made war sheik of the Aneyza. Is not that better than to be *Asil*?"

Naturally the Americans admitted that it was, and thus, having introduced the subject, they disclosed their errand to Faris, as they rode on their way to the fields where they expected to rouse the bustards for hawking.

Faris entered eagerly into their plans.

"I will keep Dervish Pasha amused and prevent him attacking the Aneyza till they have

all their corn," he said; "but in that case Jedaan must promise me that the Shammar have free pasture between the two rivers, all the way to Bagdad. My grandfather, Sofuk, was undisputed chief to that point, but my uncle Ferham has allowed the Aneyza to steal it away from us, till now we are cooped up by the Sinjar Hills. We want more room, and if the Aneyza would be our friends they must give it to us and take their own room to the south and west."

Launce and Charley had been empowered by Jedaan to engage his word for any terms that might seem just to them, for the Arabs have a great belief in the discretion of Franks; so they promised that Faris should have what he asked.

Then the mercurial Bedouin threw off all thoughts of business as if they had never troubled him; for at that moment out of a field of carnations ahead of them rose a grand bird with a speckled breast, who loomed as large as a wild turkey, but flew straight up in the air, mounting perpendicularly.

"*Houbara! Houbara!*" cried the Arabs excitedly, and Faris in a trice had unhooded Sabok and held the hawk up in the air to view the great bustard.

Sabok fluttered and screamed, Faris loosed the jesses and threw him off, and away went the gallant Desert falcon up in the air, soaring round and round the bustard in spirals, and mounting higher and higher, till both were mere black specks in the sky.

Then they went out of sight altogether, and one could only hear the wild scream of the falcon and the frightened cries of the bustard.

A moment later both were silent.

Then the Arabs shouted, and a black speck came falling through the air.

It was the bustard, clutched in the talons of the falcon. Sabok had killed the *houbara*.

CHAPTER XV.

LOVE IN A PALM GROVE.

THE great camp of the Aneyza had broken up into numerous bands, at intervals of twenty or thirty miles, for the convenience of pasture and Sotamm's branch of the Roala had pitched its tents close to the banks of the Euphrates, when Launce and Charley Benton came back from their visit to Faris, both riding mares of the best blood in Arabia.

The generous chief of the Shammar, who was nothing if not hospitable, had noticed that, while Launce rode an *Abeyeh Sherrak* mare, Charley was still mounted on the mule he had brought from Damascus, and had insisted on presenting him with one of his own mares, a dark iron-gray of the *Saadah Torgan* breed.

"It is true that she is outside *El Khamsa*, my brother," he said; "but she is none the worse for that, and her breed is noted for stoutness, as much as that of the *Abeyan Sherrak* for beauty. She is ten years old; but she will bear you as far in the day of battle as any mare in the stable of the Prophet."

Thus it happened that both brothers could now count themselves true Boy Bedouins, in mount as well as dress and language, and when they rode into the camp of the Roalas they were greeted as old friends returned.

Telaal and young Sotamm were especially

glad to see them, and the American boys could not help being touched by the enthusiastic affection of their Bedouin brothers.

They were, it is true, rather disenchanted with the elder Sotamm, who had first shown the rough side of his nature when he met Charley Benton coming back from the battle with Amina, after her rescue.

Apparently forgetful of all the rites of his Bedouin hospitality, he had abruptly ordered the young man away, telling him that "none but cowards and girls turned their backs on a battle," and from that day forth Charley had never seen the beautiful Bedouin maiden, whom he had just learned to be a probable country-woman of his own, or at least of a kindred race.

But when they came back to camp this time, the joy of Telaal and young Sotamm was so genuine and hearty that Charley felt as if all his distrust had vanished; and that evening, when the fires were all blazing and the Arabs were chanting the praises of *Antar* as if they had never heard the name before, the young lover stole away into the outer darkness under the starlight, in the hope that we would see or hear something of the maid of his heart.

He wandered out of the encampment into a grove of date palms, where all was silent, and sat down at the foot of one of the dark columnar trees.

He had not long to wait. He knew that Amina must have seen him and his brother enter camp that day, and he trusted that she would slip out into the darkness after the usual fashion of Arab maids to meet their lovers.

Therefore, when Charley heard the soft patter of bare feet on the sand, and saw a white figure stealing through the darkness toward the midst of the grove, he knew well enough who it was.

A moment later, two soft arms were round his neck, and Amina whispered:

"Oh, Shahlee, how I have longed to see you. Sitt Aicha has been so cross all day, I have been ready to die."

"And who is Sitt Aicha?" asked he, in a soothing manner.

"Sitt Aicha is the head of the harem, and she hates all us young girls and beats us if we peep out through the curtains. She is bad and I hate her, but I love you, Shahlee, because you are kind."

"And what is the reason I have never seen you since we met Sotamm?" he asked her next.

"Oh, Shahlee, what a pity he met us! I have had no peace of my life ever since. The Sitt Aicha says that I am to marry Telaal ben Mijuel, and that it is a sin for me so much as to look at an infidel like you."

"I wonder you are not afraid then to come here to meet me," Charley said in a jesting tone.

She nestled a little closer.

"Oh that was only Sitt Aicha. We don't care what she says. She is too old to love herself, and hates love."

Then Charley asked her with a voice that began to shake a little with his agitation, for he knew not what she would answer:

"Amina, are you sure that your father is Sotamm, and that your mother was his wife?"

"Sure! of course. But why do you ask Shahlee?" she said in a tone of wonder.

"Do you not," he pursued, "wear on your neck an amulet of some kind, that is not made in this land?"

"Yes," she answered readily. "I have it with me now, and Sitt Aicha says it is a guard against the evil eye."

"Could you let me see it?" asked Charley in a tone tremulous with excitement.

Amina hesitated.

"Sitt Aicha said I must never show it to any one but my husband," she observed in a timid sort of way.

"Then show it to me, for shall I not be your husband soon?" he whispered.

She put her hand in her bosom and pulled out something that gleamed in the starlight, but he could not see what it was. He told her so, and she whispered:

"It is hung on a chain and it opens."

"A locket!" he ejaculated in English.

Amina started.

"What did you say Shahlee?"

He answered her in Arabic.

"What you wear is called a locket in my tongue. They make none save in the country of the Franks. Amina, I have heard something about you, that you are not Sotamm's daughter but a girl of my own race. Your father was killed by Sotamm's men when you were an infant, and that locket contains the name of your father."

He spoke rapidly and vehemently and the girl seemed to be frightened by his words.

"You know not what you say. I am the daughter of Sotamm, sheik of the Roala, and I do not want to be a Frank. Sitt Aicha says they are devils."

"Who cares for Sitt Aicha?" he interrupted, caressingly. "Let us come under the shadow of the river-bank, where I can strike a light and look at the locket. Are you afraid to be with me, Amina?"

"Oh, no," she answered, overcome by the pleading tone of her lover.

They slipped away through the palms to the edge of the tamarisk thickets, where they were soon hidden in impenetrable obscurity.

Then Amina pulled out her amulet; the young American struck a match; and saw before him a handsome enameled locket, containing two portraits, one of a lady, the other of an officer in the uniform of the *Confederate States*, with a general's star on his shoulder.

He had just made this out, when, at one and the same moment, the match burned his fingers and he heard a deep growl.

Dropping the match, he looked into the green eyes of a lion.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STOLEN AMULET.

In that moment Charley Benton realized his rashness. He had often heard that the valley of the Euphrates was full of lions, who infested the tamarisk brakes and made sheep-raising a precarious life near the river, but he had never seen a lion by daylight.

He knew it to be the small Babylonian lion, with a short mane and a peculiar, lion-like

crescence in its tail, so faithfully shown in the Assyrian sculptures, and he had been accustomed rather to think lightly of it as a dangerous beast.

But thinking of a lion in daylight and meeting one face to face in the dark are different things; and Charley Benton felt the cold sweat start all over his body as he saw the green orbs and heard the rattling growls of the beast.

He had a revolver in his sash, but that was all; and Amina was with him to cripple him.

That very circumstance, however, was now sufficient to nerve him up to face the lion with a calmness he could not have shown at any other time, while he whispered to Amina:

"Get behind me, and go back to camp. I am in no danger."

But the girl suddenly turned obstinate.

"He shall kill us both, Shahlee," she whispered back, and put his arm round his neck like a child, hiding her face in his bosom.

Now indeed Charley Benton was very much embarrassed.

Only one point was in his favor; he knew the lion could not spring.

The thicket was so dense that the animal had to creep from tree to tree among the saplings and brush to advance at all, and it had stopped dead short at the sound of their voices.

"Get behind me, Amina," he said aloud, and put her behind him as he drew his pistol and cocked it.

Then he bethought himself that a lion is frightened by fire, and he had a whole box of patent fusees in his pocket.

No sooner did the thought cross his mind than he struck a fusee and made a step toward the lion, shouting angrily.

The effect was immediate.

The sudden spitting flash and glare of the fusee made the lion spring back with a savage snarl, backing into the brushwood, and as Charley went on shouting and striking fusees, the grim beast fairly turned tail and rushed away, snarling fiercely but cowed, till it halted twenty yards off. Without waiting for more decisive success, Charley backed out of the thicket, protected by his remaining fusees, and keeping before Amina. At last, after what seemed an age, they reached the palm grove, where the girl, after a hasty embrace of her lover, ran to the tents like a gazelle, hearing the shrill voice of Sitt Aicha screaming her name.

In that last embrace Charley Benton was sharp enough to steal the chain and locket which contained the mystery of Amina's fate, and though she uttered a cry of angry reproach she was in too much hurry to reclaim it, wherefore he carried it off in triumph to his own tent and astonished Launce by telling him in English, so that the Arabs could not understand:

"She's an American, Launce, and a Southerner too. I've found her father's portrait and he was a rebel officer."

"A what?"

"A rebel officer—a Confederate. He wears the gray. I have it in my pocket."

"Don't show it here," muttered Launce hastily, as Charley was about to pull it out. "The

Arabs will know it and some one will tell Sotamm."

Charley recognized the force of the advice.

"To-morrow," pursued Launce, "we will take a ride and look at it when we are alone. If this girl belongs to us, we must get her out of this; but it will be a dangerous task and we may have to run for it. I wish we had our horses."

"What horses?"

Charley, in his absorbing love-scrape, had almost forgotten the errand on which they came and Launce smiled to see it.

"The horse and mares for Major Jim Buckner. We have only one fit to go to Kentucky, and that is my Sherifa. Old Sotamm has taken the other, and yours, though she is a good one, is too old to be of value in improving stock."

"I feel as if I didn't care much for the horses if we only get Amina out of the power of the Sotamm," said Charley. "I don't know how it is, Launce, but I'm getting so I don't like the old sheik."

"But the boys are true as steel, said Launce thoughtfully. "I believe, Charley, they would help us to run away with Amina when the time comes, if we trusted them."

"Do you think so?"

"I do. They are different stock from the old man, if they are his sons. They are generous and he is mean. They are brave and he is almost a coward. Their mother—so Mijuel tells me—was a sister of Sedaan, and that accounts for the difference. It seems as if Jedaan is very proud of his nephew having made such a good fight against him the other day, though I didn't know he was young Sotamm's uncle then. I heard it to-day."

"Then old Sotamm is Jedaan's brother-in-law, Launce?"

"Yes, and hates him like poison. These Arabs are queer fellows, Charley. I suppose you know there's to be fun to-morrow."

"How? In what way?"

"Dervish Fasha is coming down with his regulars to make the Aneyza pay a tribute of a hundred mares, and there is to be a fight unless Faris keeps his word to prevent him."

"Faris will do it. He promised us."

"Yes, if he can get the pasturage. But it seems there is a quarrel again between Jedaan and old Sotamm. The Roala sheik is grumbling that Jedaan is only the war sheik and has no power to give away pasturage, and if he does not give way there will be trouble."

"I'll back Jedaan to get the best of it in the end," observed Charley, thoughtfully. "Did you ever notice what an eye that man has, in spite of his mean appearance and dress? It looks right through old Sotamm, for all his pride of *Asil* blood. You'll see Sotamm will give way at last."

"I'm sure I hope so," said Launce, with a yawn. "Now, then, I'm going to sleep, so don't you disturb me by talking in your sleep about Amina."

Charley colored at the sarcasm and Launce grinned at his brother, but added:

"No offense, old fellow; but I'm not in love, you know. Good-night."

He turned over and slept tranquilly, while Charley lay awake thinking of Amina till the

last verses of the glories of Antar had been sung by the Arab minstrels and all the camp was locked in sleep.

Then Charley yielded to somnolence and dreamed that he was riding over the Desert with Amina, pursued by a party of Sotamm's warriors, while his own horse was going lame and he could not make it stir a foot.

And meantime Amina was grieving over the loss of her amulet, as she called it, and imagining that all the powers of evil were hovering over her bed to strike her with pestilence till she could get back her protecting spell.

And old Sitt Aicha snored away in her corner of the tent, fancying her young charges safe, and never dreaming that Amina had met her Frank lover that very night.

CHAPTER XVII. DERVISH PASHA.

IN the early dawn of morning came a rumbling and trembling of the earth, and as the sun rose up it was reflected from the bayonets of three regiments of Turkish infantry, preceded by four field pieces and followed by a train of loaded camels and ox-wagons, defiling down toward old Sotamm's camp, and preceded by a long line of skirmishers.

Then came confusion and alarm among the Arabs, a skurrying away of flocks and herds into the Desert, and a hasty muster of all the warriors to cover the retreat.

Old Sotamm had been taken by surprise, though he had been warned that the Turks were coming.

Jedaan had sent him the warning and had given him the terms offered by Faris; but the obstinate old Arab, in his pride of *Asil* blood, had refused to listen to him.

Therefore was there consternation among the Roala; women and children crying for fear, and all the while the Turks kept advancing.

For Jedaan with the Sebaa and Faris with the Shammar were nowhere to be seen. Nothing but the Turks.

Old Sotamm was wringing his hands at his tent door, too much scared to muster his men, though his two sons were galloping to and fro among the warriors, and had already gathered seven or eight hundred.

But there were eighteen hundred Turks, with cannon.

Dervish Pasha advanced leisurely, as if he felt sure of his prey, and his long skirmish line had already lapped round half the camp, though not a shot was fired as yet.

The flocks had skurried away, but not a tent had been struck, and the women and children were all in camp, when old Sotamm came to the American boys, and cried, with the tears running down over his white beard:

"Oh, my sons, you are Franks, and have influence with the Turks. Go to Dervish Pasha and induce him to stop, or we shall all be killed. I will do anything for you."

Charley, who was soft-hearted, was about to obey, when Launce pinched his arm and asked:

"And if we stop the Turks, what shall be done for us?"

"Anything, anything," repeated the old sheik, wringing his hands.

"Will you give us the best horse in your tribe and two mares?" asked Launce, who began to feel the American instinct for bargaining rising.

"Yes, yes, anything. I will give you my daughter Aicha for a wife if you will but stop Dervish Pasha."

"Will you give me not Aicha, but *Amina*?" asked Charley, boldly.

"If it be the will of Allah, yes," was the eager reply.

Charley hesitated no longer, but mounted the mare Jedaan had given him, relying on the old sheik's promise. He did not yet know old Sotamm.

The two brothers galloped away through the Arabs, who were careering back and forth, kicking up a tremendous dust, but doing nothing, and reached the line of Turkish soldiers, who were plodding along through the sand as if they had but little interest in the battle.

The boys were halted, however, and a Turkish officer rode up to them, who saluted them politely, and asked what they wanted.

"To see Dervish Pasha."

"His excellency is yonder with his staff. Do you bring terms of peace?"

"Yes, yes," replied Charley, who took the lead. "Order your men to stop, and we will do all you want."

The officer grinned.

"When Dervish Pasha gives the order. It is not often we get a chance at these Arabs."

They rode on and soon met Dervish Pasha, a white-bearded, dignified old Turk, to whom they explained that they were the sons of the American consul at Damascus, and came to offer peace if the general would stop his advance.

Dervish Pasha smiled.

"It is not often I get a chance at the Arabs. Tell them to lay down their arms, and they shall not be hurt."

"But if there is a fight, women and children will be killed," urged Charley.

Dervish Pasha stroked his beard.

"If it be the will of Allah, let it be done. They should have surrendered in good time. Go back to them and tell them to retire into their camp. My men shall not hurt them, but I must continue my march. If the firing once begins, I cannot stop my men from killing them all."

And as there was no help for it, the two ambassadors galloped back, and told their Bedouin brothers what the pasha said, adding, with American readiness:

"There is yet time for the horsemen to escape. Ride, while you have a chance."

A moment later, the whole mass of Bedouin cavaliers swept off through the camp; the women and children ran out to greet them; leaped up behind the chargers; and away went the bold horsemen of the Anevza out of the only opening that remained, taking with them their most precious goods, and leaving only the camp with the slaves, a few camels, and some broken-down old men, including old Sotamm.

The Turks continued their leisurely advance as if they suspected nothing till the object of the move was seen, when they began to run forward, firing as they went, to cut off the retreat of the fugitives.

But the Arabs had calculated their distance too well, and the whole body rode away into the Desert, leaving two or three dead horses and a wounded man behind them as the sole proof of the marksmanship of the Turks.

Dervish Pasha had been outwitted after all, for his principal prize had escaped him; but the Roalas were left in a sadly crippled condition as they fled.

All their camel-saddles, stores of grain just purchased, tents, clothing and spare arms, were in the bands of the Turks; and they knew Dervish Pasha too well to doubt that he would destroy everything he could lay his hands on.

Charley and Launce were much concerned too, to know that Amina, whom they had hoped to find among the fugitives, was still in the camp with her father, and it was but the work of a minute for both to make up their minds to ride back into the midst of the Turks.

As they turned their horses, Launce called to Charley:

"Look over the river. What's that?"

Far away on the horizon on the other side of the Euphrates, moving along the cliffs, came a vast moving cloud of dust.

"It must be Faris," said Charley. "But where is Jedaan?"

Ah, where indeed? The war sheik of the Aneyza had vanished as if he had never existed, leaving Sotamm to fight his own battles.

The Americans found Dervish Pasha cool but grim, putting his men into bivouac round the remains of the Roala camp, in a semicircle, which touched the river at either end, and the old Turk observed as they came up:

"As the sons of an American pasha you are safe from harm in my camp; but I would not advise you to try to get out of it any more. Once is enough to deceive me."

CHAPTER XVIII.

TURKISH RULE.

SHEIK SOTAMM of the Roala sat in his tent, his face downcast and humble. By his side on the seat of honor was Dervish Pasha, whom he had been compelled to entertain as if he had been a friend instead of his conqueror.

The black slaves had brought pipes and coffee and the old Arab had made his most flowery speeches in hopes of turning the heart of the grim Turk, who answered nothing to all, but kept on smoking.

At last Dervish Pasha turned abruptly on him and said in a rough tone:

"How much longer, son of a burnt father, am I to listen to your lies? I sent you word what I wanted; where is it all?"

"I fail to understand," faltered Sotamm.

"I will repeat it," said the Turk, grimly. "I want a hundred of your best horses for the Sultan's stable, ten thousand camels, fifty thousand sheep, and that all the Roala shall come in and settle in the valley, to till the soil like the Jebours."

Sheik Sotamm lifted his hands in horror.

"Ten thousand camel! There are not so many in all the Aneyza. Fifty thousand sheep would take all we have, to the very lambs."

"What of that?" asked the Turk, sneering. "You will not need them, but oxen for the

plow, and those we will give you. The Sultan is your master, and it is time you knew it."

"But how can I give you all those things?" urged Sotamm. "I am alone and my tribe has left me. All you see around you is what is left; but the flocks are in the Desert."

"Send and get them, if you are Sheik of the Aneyza," retorted Dervish Pasha. "I will let you send a messenger, but if he come not back to-morrow by noon I will burn your camp and roast you in the pile, dog of an Arab."

Sotamm colored through his swarthy skin. He was mean and grasping; timid and irresolute; but he was *Asil*, and his blood flamed under the coarse words of the Turk.

"I cannot do what you ask," he said. "I am ready to die if need be; but I am no dog, Dervish Pasha."

"Ha, Wallah!" cried the Pasha, fiercely, and he struck the old Arab across the face with the stem of his long pipe.

Sheik Sotamm turned deadly pale, and his eyes glittered ominously.

But he said nothing, and Dervish Pasha continued in the same bullying way:

"I need forage for my artillery horses. See it be sent in by sunset. If you had any handsome girls in your tribe I would make you give me one for my harem, but your Bedouin girls are all skin and bone. I have said."

Charley and Launce Benton had been silent spectators of the scene, and the hand of the elder brother stole to the pistol in his belt, as he heard the coarse words of the Turk.

But old Sotamm retained his quiet manner and there was a certain dignity in him as he rose and said:

"My lord's wishes shall be obeyed. I will send to my people; and all that my lord asks shall be here by sunset."

He quietly left the tent, and Dervish Pasha, observed in a half apologetic way, and speaking French, to the Americans:

"We have to put these rascals down at first, or they would ride right over us. You Frankish gentlemen see what trouble it is to govern Arabs."

The boys made no direct reply, and the Pasha entered into a gay conversation on other matters, displaying a good deal of intelligence and trying to remove the bad impression left at his violence.

All day long the Pasha sat in the tent of Sotamm and smoked pipes or drank coffee, while his men made their camp outside, and the guns were put into battery, pointing to the Desert. An old Arab, only just able to ride, had been dispatched by Sotamm to the Desert, and had returned with the news that the Aneyza would obey their chief and bring in the tribute demanded.

Charley Benton and his brother found out that they were in a sort of honorable captivity, for when either of them tried to ride out of the camp he was turned back by Turkish sentries.

They made the best of a bad bargain and spent a part of the day in an empty tent, examining Amina's locket, which held—as Charley had predicted it would—the secret of her parentage.

There was no mistaking the portrait of the

lady in the locket for any one but the mother of Amina, and the identity of the Confederate officer was settled by the discovery behind it of the legend:

"Presented to Mrs. Peyton C. Buckner, by her husband, January 19th, 1862."

Then the boys were full of pride and excitement, for they knew now that Amina was not only a daughter of America, but a relative of their father's friend, Major Jim Buckner.

They had often heard Colonel Benton tell of the unhappy division between Major Jim and his brother in the Civil War, one fighting for the Union, the other ardently for Secession.

When the Confederacy collapsed, General Peyton Buckner had disappeared from the country with his wife and baby, and it was rumored he had taken service with the Pasha of Egypt.

The discovery of the locket showed that he had done no such thing, for the report of Jedaan was distinct that the father of Amina had been a Frankish merchant of Bagdad, and the boys could only conclude that the death of his wife had probably determined him to return home with his child, on which journey he was killed by the Aneyza.

"And now let us find Amina and give her back her locket," observed Launce, soberly. "The poor child must be very nearly frightened to death by the Turks."

They slipped off among the tents, which were not approached by the Turkish sentries, though the Pasha's staff were in possession of Sotamm's quarters.

When they reached the harem tent, they found all the women that were left—old wrinkled bags for the most part—gathered round Amina as if to protect her from harm, for she was the only young girl left in camp; and Charley walked up to her and gave her back the amulet.

She uttered a sigh of relief as she put it in her bosom, and said reproachfully:

"Ah, if that had been here last night, this would not have happened, Shablee."

The old woman seemed too much dazed to understand anything. They knew the boys to be friends, and the Turks relentless enemies; questions of etiquette no longer troubled them.

All that afternoon Arabs were coming into the Turkish camp and piling forage in front of Dervish Pasha's tent. By sunset the pile reached to the peak of the main marquee.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEDOUIN REVENGE.

THE night closed in dark and starless by the border of the river, for the heavy mist of the lowlands had blotted out the faint light of Heaven.

The Pasha had ordered a basket of champagne into the tent of which he had taken possession; and he and his staff were drinking it in defiance of the Koran, for modern Turks are pretty lax in their Mohammedanism.

Old Sotamm had been seen at intervals in the afternoon, taking and sending his messages to and from the Aneyza, who had fled to the Desert.

As the sun set Launce and Charley noticed that the Arabs in the camp were very numerous though all were unarmed, and that they had scattered about among the Turkish soldiers, with whom they were conversing amicably and exchanging pipes.

To the boys, who had seen the blow given by Dervish Pasha to the proud chief of the Aneyza, all this quiet and security boded ill for the Turks, and they were not one bit surprised to be greeted among the tents just after nightfall by Telaal and Sotamm, in the disguise of common Arabs:

"Take your horses down into the thickets," whispered Telaal. "In an hour from now there will be fighting such as Dervish Pasha never saw. Jedaan and Faris are waiting for us."

"And what is to become of the women in the battle?" asked Charley.

Telaal shrugged his shoulders.

"Allah will take care of them. What are all the women of the world to the honor of a Sheik of the Aneyza?"

"But your sister Amina is in the camp," urged Charley, who was trembling at the thought of the girl in such a scene. "We ought to tell her so that she may hide."

"Tell her *nothing*," answered the young Arab, with gleaming eyes. "Men can hear and keep silence; women are like parrots, who only talk what is told them. Be ready to help us when you hear the war-cry, for you are our sworn brothers."

The Americans promised and did as they were advised, leading their mares down into the tamarisk thickets by the edge of the river.

Charley took the further precaution to lead down the mare once captured from Jedaan by his brother and since appropriated by old Sotamm, observing:

"If that mare gets away from us a second time, it will be our own fault, Launce."

Then they went back to the camp and found all quiet, while a number of Arabs were busy piling the hay and straw into a regular wall round the Pasha's tent, shutting it in on all sides.

Inside the tent all was jollity as the Turkish general and his staff tipped champagne, smoked cigarettes, and told stories.

Then Charley Benton grew too anxious to wait longer, and stole off to the harem tent and beckoned Amina to come out.

Sitt Aicha and the old woman had gone to sleep, stupefied with grief and fear, and the girl stepped softly away from them and came to Charley.

"What is it?" she whispered. "You cannot have the amulet again."

"I do not want it," he whispered back. "I only want you to come with me. We are going to try and escape."

"Escape!" she echoed. "How can I escape with a Frank and leave my father?"

"I told you before, Sotamm was not your father," he retorted sharply. "The man in the gray coat in the picture was your father, and he was a great friend of my father. Come with me and I will take you to the country of the Franks, where you shall see great cities, and

ships, and railroads and all our wonders. Your amulet has told me who you are, and you are a Frank yourself."

The girl was hesitating under the flood of new ideas let in on her mind by his speech, when a broad glare of red light shone through the coarse goat's-hair cloth of the harem tent, and they heard startled shouts in Turkish from the staff officers of Dervish Pasha.

A moment later came a wild yell from thousands of throats, and Charley seized Amina round the waist and bore her off down to the tamarisk thicket where the horses were standing.

As he ran, a fearful sight met his eyes. The great wall of forage round the Pasha's tent was all ablaze, the red flames leaping forty feet in the air, and the unhappy Turks were roasting alive inside, while a dense throng of Arabs was gathered outside, brandishing the short scimitars they had been hiding under their shirts.

All round the lines more Arabs were among the stacks of arms, and had seized the bayoneted muskets, with which they were stabbing the unfortunate Turks.

If the surprise of the Roala had been bad in the morning, that of the Turks was worse at night.

And in the midst of all the confusion of yells, curses and occasional shots, Jedaan and a dense host of mounted Arabs could be seen bearing down on the camp at full speed.

One glance satisfied Charley; and over the bank he plunged with Amina, and was out of the tumult in a moment. Then he heard a rapid step; Launce dashed by to his mare, seized her and rode back into the battle, crying:

"Come on, Charley. Remember our brothers. This is no time for love-making."

And indeed so it seemed, for Amina cried to him:

"Go, go, warriors are made for battle. I am safe enough. Go, or I shall hate you."

Thus urged, Charley took his horse and rode back into the battle, just as the reports of cannon showed that the Turks were not going to be massacred without any resistance.

As he reached the top of the bank the huge pile of blazing hay lighted up the camp and made everything plain.

The Turks had gathered into knots among the arms stacks, and were firing at the Arabs in all directions, while the artillerymen in the battery were discharging their pieces as fast as they could load them, and the Arabs were recoiling before them.

Charley had inherited a soldier's eye from his father, and saw in a moment that a charge on the guns was necessary.

Dervish Pasha, his hair scorched close to his head, and followed by a few officers, broke through the blazing pile as he came out, and the Turks recognized him with a shout and fired faster than ever.

With eighteen hundred men, breech-loading rifles and grape-shot, against wild Arabs, victory was by no means out of the tough old soldier's grasp yet, and Charley knew it.

With that thought he galloped through the Arabs, shouting:

"Charge the guns!"

CHAPTER XX.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

JEDAAN and Faris, with a host of wild horsemen, came sweeping down after Charley, and in another minute he was firing his revolvers right and left into the Turkish artillerymen, while the Arabs were spearing them down.

Then they swept round on the scattered infantry and drove them in confusion toward the river outside of the camp limits, where they rallied among the tamarisk thickets and opened a fire that caused the Arabs to retreat.

But the camp was regained, and with it they had captured the guns, colors and stores of the Turkish commander, who retired up the Euphrates a sauder man.

Then, when the fighting was all over, Jedaan, Sotamm, Faris, and the four Boy Bedouins met and embraced each other in the center of the camp, and Faris said:

"Behold, we have destroyed our enemy because we were united. Should we not now make a league with each other?"

And Jedaan answered:

"It is good, my brother, for are we not all brothers of one blood to hate Turks?"

To which Faris rejoined:

"It is well. Let us make a covenant that the river shall divide our flocks and herds as far as Bagdad. I will not come over on your side, neither shall you come on my side, save to help each other in fighting the Turks. So shall there be peace between us."

Jedaan bowed his head.

"It is good for me; but what says Sheik Sotamm? I am only war sheik of the Aneyza; he is the head sheik."

And Sotamm, now that the danger was over, stroked his beard and said:

"I must take counsel with my old men, for I may not break the customs of the tribe."

Faris tossed his head proudly.

"It is the custom of the Shammar to hold a benefit sacred. Had we not been here, you were in Dervish Pasha's power. I have broken the customs of my tribe to save you from death, and all I ask is pasturage for a few sheep."

"The Aneyza took possession of the east bank of the river above Bagdad when I was a nursing child," answered old Sotamm in a crabbed manner. "How can I give up the rights of my people?"

"The people are willing to give it up," softly interposed Jedaan.

"But I am not willing," was the harsh reply. "Is Faris a trader, that he wants to sell his help for pasturage?"

Faris for a moment looked angry enough to strike the old sheik, but he held in long enough to say:

"Hereafter Sotamm can fight his own foes without help from Faris."

"Or from Jedaan, either," interposed the angry war sheik, in a tone of most supreme disgust. "The Shammar and Sebaa can be friends. Let the Roala go tell the Motafla how they let Turks take their camp and women from them. Jedaan will help Sotamm no more."

The old sheik shrugged his shoulders.

As long as he was out of danger he had but little care for his reputation,

"Sotamm will keep his eyes and ears open hereafter," he said, coolly. "He has sons that will watch for him, too."

The two Americans had been looking on at this struggle of wills with interest, and now Charley thought it time to put in a word.

"The sheik has not forgotten his promise to my brother and myself?" he said, in a tone of inquiry.

Sotamm allowed a grim smile to curl his white beard as he answered:

"In war no man is bound by a promise given in danger. What said I?"

"You promised to give us the best horse and two mares in your tribe, and to give me your daughter Amina for a wife," was Charley's straightforward answer.

Sotamm smiled again.

"How can I give another man's horse? There is Ghanim ben Saadi, who has a bay stallion of the Kehilan Abu Argub breed, but he will sell it. Ask him. I have none."

"But your daughter?" persisted Charley.

"If it be Allah's will you shall have her. But she is promised to Telaal ben Mijuel, and must marry him first. If he divorce her, well and good."

Charley turned away, full of disgust at the old man's duplicity, and met the eyes of his sworn brother, Telaal, who made a slight signal to him to say no more at that time.

Of course he obeyed the unspoken mandate and left Sotamm to himself, as did all the rest, while the Arabs who had come to the rescue bivouacked round the fires and regaled themselves out of the stores in the wagon-train of Dervish Pasha.

When Charley bethought himself of Amina and went to seek her, he found that she had gone, and traced her back to the harem tent, where now was nothing but the most animated gabbling, for the old women were nearly crazy with delight at the rescue.

He heard her voice inside the tent and went away satisfied, to be accosted a little later by his three brothers, by blood and by adoption.

Telaal drew him into the palm garden and said to him seriously:

"Why did not my brother tell us at first that he greatly desired our sister to wife? He could have had her."

Charley stammered:

"In our country we do not make love that way, till we have asked the girl."

Telaal laughed merrily.

"That is good, and we Arabs are the same. We will do anything to meet the girl we love, and to cheat her father. My brother should have told us. We will help him to marry Amina."

Charley was surprised.

"Why, I thought you would be angry."

Telaal put his hands on his shoulders.

"When we Arabs swear the oath of brotherhood," he said, "we keep it to the death. We will give you our sister, and we will do anything, even to cheating our father to help you. You say you love Amina. It is for us to find if she loves you and to give her to you. As for the horse of Ghanim ben Saadi, he is for sale

and you shall have him to take to Shawm el Shereef if it takes all my money."

"It need not cost you a penny," continued he. "We have enough stolen camels and sheep to pay for a dozen like him."

So saying the young Arab led Charley away to another part of the palm garden, and whispered, pointing to the east:

"There's Amina. Lansa has told me and my brother all. She waits for you and shall be yours."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BAY STALLION.

FOUR Arab cavaliers were galloping over the flowers toward the heart of the Hommad next day, holding their tufted lances over their shoulders in traveling style.

Two of them wore the ordinary Arab shirt, cloak and keffiah, and rode on Bedouin pads; the other two were attired in a semi-European dress and were armed with pistols and repeating rifles in addition to the long lance, while they sat erect in deep Turkish saddles.

They were the four Boy Bedouins, and were seeking the band of Ghanim ben Saadi, to find the famous bay stallion Alkader. Telaal had promised that he would induce Ghanim to sell the horse, which was now five years old, and the Americans were crazy to see it.

On they rode, hour after hour, till the banks of the Euphrates were far out of sight; and still they were in the midst of the flocks and herds of the Aneyza.

At last a dark line appeared in the far distance and Sotamm said:

"Those are the tents of Ghanim. He has more horses than any man in our tribe, and knows more about them than any man except Mijuel, who is visiting him. I am glad Mijuel is there."

"And why?" asked Launce.

"Because Ghanim will cheat us if we have not good advice."

"How will he cheat us?"

"He will bring out all his horses, and we shall choose a poor one."

"How do you know that?"

"Because the poorest horses always look the best at Ghanim's. He keeps the good ones disfigured on purpose."

"And how will Mijuel be able to tell any better than us?"

"Mijuel will measure all his horses in the night."

"Measure them? How is that?"

"Did you never hear of the two measures of a horse?" asked Telaal, seeming to be surprised in his turn. "I thought even the Franks knew that."

"We do not. Tell us."

"They are these. Both start from the middle of the withers. Measure one way over the neck between the ears down to the end of the upper lip. That is the front measure. The other is from the same place down the back to the last joint of the tail. Those are the two measures."

"But what have they to do with the horse, and what does it all mean?" asked Charley, impatiently.

The young Arab replied gravely:

"They are the foundation of goodness. If the measures are equal it is a good, safe horse, but not a fine one. If the front measure be short, it is a poor horse. Buy it not. But if the front measure be longer than the rear measure, it is a good horse, and the longer it is, the better the animal."

"But will Ghanim let us measure his horses?" asked Launce.

"Not so, or we should have no trouble. That is why I sent Mijuel to see him, for Mijuel will do it in the night, when no one is looking, and will keep a record of all the horses."

As he spoke they perceived an old Arab coming toward them, mounted on a sorry-looking chestnut horse, whose bones appeared to protrude through its rough hide; and Telaal whispered:

"That is Ghanim, and I should not wonder if that were one of his best horses."

The Americans felt disappointed at the appearance of the animal, which was only about fourteen hands high, with little to recommend it beyond a small, lean head, with a very fine muzzle.

They saluted Ghanim politely, and he returned their greeting.

"Peace be unto you, my brothers. You are coming to honor my poor tent with a visit, and to see my horses?"

"Yes, and to buy one if we can agree about the price," said Launce, in his direct way, at which Ghanim smiled and answered:

"All my horses are yours, my lord; but a Turk could not get one for less than forty thousand piasters" (\$2,000.)

Launce was a little nonplussed at this, for he had not expected to pay more than a quarter of that sum, but Charley, who was cooler in horse matters, as he was warmer in love affairs, said in English to his brother:

"It is a game of bluff, Launce. Father told me that a thousand dollars is more than any of them really expects."

Ghanim looked suspiciously at them as he caught the sound of the strange tongue, but he said nothing, and escorted them to his tent in silence, where he treated them to a dish of *couscoussou*, apologizing for his poverty in not being able to kill a sheep for their entertainment.

Somehow or other they did not exactly like the manners of Ghanim, whose long-time sojourn among the townsmen of Bagdad had given him a cunning air, which was not diminished when they came to talk horse over pipes and coffee.

"If the effendis wish to buy one of my horses, they can follow the same rule I have made for all Frankish effendis," said the horse-dealer, politely. "They have their choice of all my stallions, for twenty thousand piasters, but the mares I will not sell. I will have the horses brought out for inspection, and the effendis can choose as they pass—'Salaam *alcikoum ya Mijuel*,'" he added, as the stately old Arab entered the tent, and sat down by the side of his young chief.

Mijuel, to all appearance, was as innocent of any collusion with Ghanim's visitors as a stranger; but nevertheless, the horse-dealer seemed uneasy at his presence, and observed:

"I thought you had gone back to camp?"

"I had thought of that, but I saw the son of my master coming, so I turned back to greet him," was the composed answer.

"We will not pay twenty thousand piasters for choice of the stallions," observed the quiet Charley, at this juncture. "Five thousand is quite enough, or we can keep our money."

"Why should we quarrel over money, my lord?" answered Ghanim. "Say fifteen thousand, and the best of my horses is yours."

"Five thousand is enough. I will give no more," answered Charley.

Ghanim looked mournful.

"I am a poor man, and you are the friend of my chief, effendi. Call it twelve thousand, and take your pick."

"I will be generous with you, and say six," replied Charley. "You cannot get six thousand piasters in the Desert."

"The English milord offered me twelve, effendi," pleaded Ghanim.

"Then why did you ask me twenty? You are not worthy to be an Aneyza. You should go to the Jebours and plow," was Charley's sarcastic answer. "Come, I will give you seven, or go away."

"Give me ten, effendi, and I will call blessings on your head," protested Ghanim, and to this at last Charley agreed.

Then the horse-dealer went out to call up his horses, and Mijuel whispered, in a hurried manner:

"When I cough, it is the next horse after the one then passing. He is the prince of horses, and Kehelan Abu Argub, but he has been disguised."

He resumed the smoking of his long pipe, and all remained tranquil; for Ghanim was coming back with a crowd of grooms, leading horses and mares to the number of about thirty.

The horse-dealer sat down and clapped his hands, and the procession passed.

First came a beautiful white mare, and he announced her as:

"Hamama, pride of Kehilet Messeneh."

Charley looked at Hamama with a longing eye, but Launce observed:

"Wrong colors. Pretty, though."

Next came a small black stallion, not much more than a pony, whom Ghanim extolled to the skies as unequaled for purity of blood.

"Maneyghi, effendi; Maneyghi Hedruj, a wonderful beast. My advice is to take him and let all go."

But the black pony did not suit any more than a chestnut, an iron-gray and two white horses. At last as a very pretty chestnut horse, fat and sleek, was before the door, Mijuel coughed slightly.

"There now is your horse, effendi," said the glib Ghanim. "Seglawi Sheyfi, and swift as a gazelle."

But they were looking at the next horse, a tall scraggy beast, with a coat that looked as if it had never been cleaned, a head that drooped down to his knees, and a generally woebegone, spiritless look that was very disenchanting.

"The next horse I recommend no one to take," said Ghanim candidly. "I would like to sell him to get rid of him; but he is not fit for a

gentleman like the effendi. His breed is Kehilan Abu Argub, but that is nothing and—”

“I will take that horse,” said Charley in a decided tone. “I cannot afford to buy a good one, so he will do.”

Ghanim looked nonplussed for a moment; but then his native Bedouin good-humor prevailed, and he burst out laughing.

“The effendis are fit to belong to the Aneyza,” he cried. “Ghanim’s word is passed and they shall have the horse. That is the great Alkader himself, and you have chosen the best horse in my stud.”

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ELOPEMENT.

IT was an actual fact. The mean-looking horse with the staring coat and languid air was the celebrated Alkader, under the influence of an opium ball; and he soon showed what he was made of, after he got back to the Aneyza camp, where the Benton boys paid over five hundred broad silver dollars as the price of the grandest Arab stallion, since the pride of England, the Godolphin Arabian, that had ever been sold to a Frank.

Telaal and the young Sotamm were delighted with the bargain and chuckling over the way in which they had outwitted the sharp Ghanim.

Naturally the boys were very grateful to Mijuel for his services, and delighted his heart by a present of twenty bright silver pieces; for it is a curious fact that the Desert Arabs, who seldom see money and have no use for it, are extraordinarily fond of the bright silver dollars, which they will bury in the earth and gloat over for years.

And now the boys had accomplished a great part of their mission, for they had secured a horse and a mare of the best breeds of El Khamsa, with another mare of equally good lineage, though not in the first flush of youth.

It only remained for them to get away in peace to Damascus, and if possible to carry away Amina and the fine chestnut mare Launce Benton had taken from Jedaan, but which Sotamm senior had taken from the boy in violation of his duties as host.

The time was ripe and the will good for the deed, while the opportunities were growing better every day.

For the Aneyza had been able to buy their corn in peace since the ignominious repulse of Darvish Pasha, and the different bands were already moving off into the heart of the Hammam to seek the summer pastures.

At last came the day when the Roala were ordered to move out to the Desert; and a grand sight it was to see the vast herds of camels and sheep passing over the plain, far as the eye could see, with the caravan of the tribe in long strings in their midst. The black loads of tents with the poles trailing in the sand, women and children perched on the humps of the camels, were mingled with the strange butterfly-looking litters in which the ladies of the principal chiefs were carried when on the march.

Perched on the saddle under a canopy with curtains sat the lady, and on each side stretched

out a platform of basket-work, that looked like two enormous wings projecting from the camel’s side.

In one of these queer conveyances, all shrouded in with curtains, sat Amina, who by this time had become quite reconciled to hearing from Charley in their nightly meetings that she was one of his own people, that he loved her as the apple of his eye, and all the rest of the stuff that lovers are wont to utter.

The love part she had believed all along; and through believing that, she gradually came to believing all the rest he told her, though at first she had looked on the idea of her being a girl of the Franks with horror.

But when the fact had fully entered her mind, when she had looked on the portraits of her father and mother and heard from Charley’s lips all he knew, a great change had taken place in her.

Struggling recollections of early infancy and English words she had heard began to haunt her, till she became as eager to get away from the Arabs and see her American relatives as Charley was to take her.

And in the meantime Telaal and Sotamm had planned the elopement of the young couple with all an Arab’s delight in love affairs; and had arranged that it was to take place at the very first halt in the Desert.

The Roala did not move far on their first march from the river-bank. Arab tribes on the march average ten or fifteen miles a day and that is all, being guided entirely by the presence of grass and water.

As both were yet plenty, there was no need of going far, and so they went into camp at noon and spread the sheik’s tent in the midst of a huge bed of dark purple stocks, while geraniums and pinks scented the country for miles.

Now the young Arabs began to play jerud with each other, while the women set up the tents and a party rode off with their hawks to find a bustard.

Charley Benton, who had taken advantage of a few days’ rest to have Alkader dressed and rubbed down, was now trying his horse’s paces and delighted with his performance, for he proved to be far swifter than Sherifa, ridden by Launce, though the bay mare was as beautiful as a picture, and Alkader had but little pretensions to good looks. But although he had a straight ewe neck, his head was splendid, with a tapering muzzle, small enough to drink out of a quart pot, and his strong loins, low hocks and clean legs gave token that he was a horse to be depended on for every day and all day long.

He seemed never to be tired of galloping, and was always ready to run away when turned toward camp after a long chase into the Desert.

So passed the afternoon in sport and racing, and at last the sun set, after which comes the hour of poetry and romance in a Bedouin encampment.

Launce Benton watched his brother slip off among the tents to the outskirts of the camp in the usual style of a Bedouin lover, and then strolled off to his own special tent, where Deinetri—whom we have almost forgotten all this while—was cooking his master’s supper at a fire of dry bones that once belonged to a camel.

"Demetri," said Launce, in English, "are you not almost tired of the Desert?"

"Ah, signor, dat I am fatigued!" cried the Greek, plaintively. "I will give six, seven, ten candle to de shrine of San Nicholas in Antioch, de day I see it again."

"Get ready to start to-night, then," said Launce, smiling. "But hold; are the beasts ready for a run of two hundred miles?"

"Two hundred mile, signor? Not all at once. No baggage-camel can do it."

"Then sell your camels and buy *delouls*.* Leave all behind you we cannot carry, and take onl. water and food."

Demetri claps his hands.

"Ah, that I am happy! The old sheik has been bothering me ever since we came here to buy *delouls*, for he has plenty of them."

"Get all you can and load them up," said Launce, quietly. "You can spend all the money you want and trade off bedding and furniture. We shall want nothing but speed on our way to Damascus."

"And will not my lords want supper?" asked the amazed *cawass*.

"No; the first thing to do is to get ready to move. Tell Sheik Sotamm that we are going home to-morrow, leaving him on the march, but have your *delouls* saddled and ready to start an hour after the midnight star dips."

The *cawass* bowed and Launce knew he could depend on him. Then the boy went to old Sotamm's hut and found the Arabs as usual clustered round the sheik's fire, listening to the musicians chanting the everlasting "glories of *Antar*."

He staid by the fire listening till Telaal glided by him and plucked him by the sleeve. Then he followed his adopted brother to the back of the tent and found him waiting with a joyful face.

"Amina is ready," whispered the boy, "and we have loosed Jedaan's mare, which belongs to you by rights. All you have to do is to ride away together and we will take care the chase goes astray behind you, my brother. In an hour the minstrels will have finished, but you ought to start before that."

"Why?" asked Launce.

"Because your departure will not be noticed while they are singing. When all is silent the sleeping Arab hears well. It is time you were away now."

Launce told him that it would take a little time for Demetri to get ready, but Telaal retorted:

"And what need of his getting ready? I will take care of all your property for you, and not a plaster's worth shall be taken. I have *delouls* saddled ready for all the men you lead, if the townsmen are not afraid their bowels will gush out with the trot of our racers."

Launce was much affected at the ready and thoughtful kindness of his Bedouin brother, and embraced him heartily as Telaal led him away to the rear of the camp, where, sure enough, he

* *Delouls* are the light riding camel, distinguished from the heavy beast of burden. They are to the common camel what a racer is to a cart-horse. The Sahara Arabs call them *hairies*, and the Egyptian Arabs *hygheens*.

found a number of *delouls* ready saddled, each with his water-skin and bread-bag at the horn of the saddle.

Presently Demetri and the servants came up, having been warned by a messenger from Telaal, and lastly came Charley, half leading, half carrying Amina, who was sobbing as naturally as any civilized girl on the eve of an elopement.

Then the whole party mounted—the servants on *delouls*, the brothers and Amina on their horses.

Telaal accompanied them out of the encampment till they got among the herds of camels, when he said:

"Follow the stars of Orion as they sink in the west. Where they drop is the road to Shawn el Shereef. If you meet Sebaa on the road, you can fight. God be with you."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ALONE IN THE DESERT.

WHEN the sun rose up in the sky next day, and looked down over the Desert, it found the party of our Boy Bedouins nearly fifty miles away from the camp of the Roala, and surrounded by withered herbage that hardly hid the brown sands of the Desert.

They halted at sunrise and fed the horses, while the *delouls* grazed on the dry flowers and bushes of the Desert:

Two quarts of barley, a little water from the water-skins and all four of the noble creatures seemed as fresh as when they started and full of spirits.

Then away they went at the rapid journey amble of the Bedouin, and in an hour afterward had left behind them the last vestige of vegetation, while the hot sun shone down on the bare sands of the Desert.

They held their course by the compass due to the east, avoiding the regular trucks of the migrating tribes whenever they met them.

They knew enough of old Sotamm to be certain he would pursue them, and they wished to put as much sand between him and them as possible.

By afternoon they judged they had covered a hundred miles from their starting point and had accomplished half of their journey, but the horses began to show symptoms of fatigue. Even Arab horses cannot do a hundred miles in sixteen hours without feeling it.

Demetri, who had now resumed his functions of guide and counselor—so long given over to the Arabs—recommended that they should make a halt in the next hollow, let the camels feed, rest and bait the horses and go on again at night.

"We shall come on grass again very soon, signori," he remarked. "The Desert begins to roll and wherever there are hollows in the Desert at this time of year there is water under the sand and flowers grow above it."

So it proved in a very short time, for as soon as they had crossed a little ridge of sand-hills that lay in their path, they began to see flowers again, and a second ridge brought them to a small valley in the midst of which sparkled—sight of wonder—a tiny pool of water.

Here they halted and allowed the camels to drink, which they did readily enough, for even a camel, though he can go for three or four days without water, does not hanker after it, and cannot do any very heavy work on such short commons.

Then they dismounted, fed grain to their horses and allowed them to graze on the flowers, while the camels made short work of the purple stocks, their favorite food.

The birds and beasts of the Desert had evidently known of the existence of this little oasis before, for they found flocks of the Desert lark, a number of bustards and plenty of hares in the thick herbage.

But Demetri dissuaded them from shooting anything:

"We have stumbled on this valley by accident, signori," he said, "but we may be sure it is well known to the Arabs, and in the Desert one cannot be too careful. Our dangers are all ahead of us now, till we reach the groves of Shawm el Shereef."

They saw the sense of his advice, and kept quietly inside the valley, while Launce kept a sharp lookout from the top of one of the hillocks over the Desert all round.

It was well he did so, for, toward sunset, moving figures came in sight from the north, and were soon made out to be a whole band of Arabs on their migrations coming straight to the valley in which the travelers were resting.

Of course after that nothing was to be done but to saddle up and move off as soon as possible, and they lost no time in doing so.

As they moved out of the valley, Launce looked toward the north and saw that a party of forty or fifty horsemen had left the trailing caravan and were coming rapidly toward them.

"What shall we do, Demetri?" asked Charley, who had grown unusually timid since he had carried off Amina.

"We must fight and run, signori. We have here seven men, and we all have rifles. Yonder are forty Arabs, with nothing but spears and swords. We must keep them off."

"But the lady may be hurt," objected Charley, who looked at everything through a lover's spectacles.

"So much the more reason we should fight hard, signor. Our course lies to the west. Once let us put those men behind us, and I am not afraid. But they are trying to cut us off."

Indeed, this was true, for the Arabs, coming from the north, were moving diagonally down so as to head off the Christians from Damascus. It was evident they regarded them as fair prey for Desert robbers.

Now the little party took a more rapid pace; the *delouls* going at a long sweeping trot, the horses at a hand-gallop, but the Arabs, who were at full speed, reached the point before them, and spread out into a line on the road to Damascus. Demetri rode on ahead of his little party till he came within a few hundred yards of the expectant robbers, when he wheeled away to the south and passed before them in a long file of horsemen and camels, Amina riding so as to be screened from sight.

The Arabs raised a yell, and came racing for them, and then the chase began in earnest.

Charley, Launce, Demetri, and Amina were on horseback, the four servants on *delouls*, and they soon found, as they increased their pace, that they were gaining on the mass of Arabs owing to the goodness of their mounts.

Away they went to the south at full speed and only some twelve or fourteen of their pursuers could keep up with them. All these had bay or chestnut horses.

Then Charley cried to Amina:

"Ride on with the rest and turn to the west as soon as you hear us firing. We will stop some of these bold gentlemen."

The quick-witted girl, accustomed to peril, nodded, and darted to the head of the camels, which followed blindly after the chestnut mare she rode.

Then Charley, Launce, and Demetri began to pull at their horses, dropped to the rear of the caravan, and looked back at their pursuers.

The foremost Arabs were within a hundred yards, and the rest strung out for half a mile.

In that moment the American boy wheeled Alkader round, raised his repeating rifle, and sent a bullet whistling close to the foremost Arab's head, cutting the cord of his *keffiah* and knocking him stunned out of the saddle into the dirt.

It was a chance shot, but it had a wonderful effect.

With a wild cry of terror every Arab pulled up his mare, and began to gallop to and fro, shouting and shaking his spear, but afraid to advance.

Launce followed Charley's example with even more effect, for he fired off all the loads of his Winchester carbine without stopping, firing into the mass of the Arabs without much aim, but near enough.

Two of his chance bullets struck—one wounding an Arab, another a mare—and it was all over in less than six seconds.

Then the Bedouins, who, like our Indians are very chary of exposing their lives save in desperate circumstances, uttered a loud cry of "Sheitan!" (Satan) and turned their mares to flee.

"Now, signori, pi tols and charge!" yelled Demetri, excitedly. "We have them running at last."

Away went the three as hard as they could tear, firing their revolvers rapidly near their would-be enemies, and in another moment the whole band of robbers was fleeing in wild confusion, leaving their chief and another man lying on the ground while two riderless mares were trotting about with head and tail up, neighing with excitement and evidently enjoying the fun.

The Christians did not follow their success far, but they took good care not to let the mares escape, and the docile creatures used, to regard men as friends from their first days of colthood, submitted to be led away without the slightest trouble.

Then Launce, Charley and Demetri galloped off on their old course just as the sun went down. They could see that Amina had led their little party to the west, faithful to her instructions, as soon as the battle began.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SHAWM EL SHEREEF.

COLONEL BENTON, U. S. Consul at Damascus, was reading a letter from his old friend Major Jim Buckner, and his face was lighted up as he read, for it was postmarked at Jerusalem through the American consulate there and it told him that his friend would be there that very day.

"I have been thinking," wrote Major Jim, "ever since I wrote to you last that I was giving you a right smart chance of trouble, more than I had any right to do, and that you might be a little pinched for ready money to pay for those horses I asked you to get. I'm told the Arabs ask enormous prices for their horses, and it's not fair to come on a friend in such a hurry. So I've made up my mind to let the farm go for a few months and come on myself to see my old friend. Therefore you may expect me right on top of this letter and if you haven't found the horses yet, you and I will take a trip among the Arabs ourselves and bring back something to astonish the natives in Kentuck. I expect, if all goes well, to be in Damascus, dragoon and all, by the twenty-fifth of April."

"And this is the twenty-sixth. Jim may be here at any minute," muttered the colonel. "I wish those boys were back. It's about time I heard—"

He was going to say "something about them," when the second *cawass*, a slim young Maronite Christian who had replaced Demetri during his absence, entered the room, bowed almost to the ground and said to his master:

"A strange gentleman has arrived at the consulate and says he is an old friend of the consul effendi."

"Jim Buckner, by Jove!" cried the colonel, and he forgot all his dignity as he rushed downstairs to greet a tall, thin gentleman with a pointed black beard and yellow face, who held out his hand and exclaimed:

"Why, George Benton, what a house you have got. Is this the way you live among the savages? Waal, I swear I'm right glad to see ye. And how's the boys? Where are they?"

"They've gone after your horses, Jim," was the response.

"Gone after my horses! Why, ye don't mean to say you've sent two little boys out to look after horses for me? Why, they'll be killed sure—"

"They're grown up, Jim. You forget that. And as for being killed, they are not half as likely to be that as you would—"

Further conversation was cut off by the sound of shouting in the narrow street outside the consulate.

Then came a clatter of horse-hoofs, and Launce Benton dashed into the yard and began to fire off all the shots in his revolver up in the air, after the Bedouin fashion of expressing joy, while the consul's servants all yelled together, and Major Jim stared as if he thought some lunatic had broken loose in the court.

The consul smiled to see his son's wild capers, for he knew all was right, and presently Launce jumped off his horse, hugged his father, and cried out:

"We've got 'em, we've got 'em, and we've found Major Jim's niece, too, father. Charley's bringing her along, and he's oh so sweet on her. Don't I wish Major Jim was here."

When he was introduced to Major Jim in person his astonishment and pleasurable excitement knew no bounds as he shook the tall Kentuckian's hand with a grip so powerful that Major Jim exclaimed:

"Look here, George Benton, you told me your youngsters were boys, and this young cuss has a grip like a steam-engine. That'll do, young man. What was that you were saying jest now about a niece of mine? I've got no niece in these parts."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Launce.

Major Jim looked hard at him.

"Sure of it? Of course. I never had but one brother, and he died long ago with no children."

"Where did he die?" asked Launce, in a tone that showed he had a motive.

"Well, that's more than I can rightly say," was the reply of Major Jim, in a meditative sort of way. "You see Peyton and I didn't hitch horses in the war. He 'lowed the South would whip and I held on to the old flag. And after the war he went off to Egypt where I heard of him in the service of the Khedive. He wrote me only once after that when he sent me home some of his things and told me he had resigned and was going into business to buy wool of the Arabs in Bagdad. That is the last I ever heard of him till I saw in the papers that the plague had swept through Bagdad, and his name was in the list of dead."

"And are you sure he never was married?" asked Colonel Benton, who had listened with a great appearance of interest. "You remember Peyton used to be very sweet on Miss Lizzie Calhoun, and that she disappeared from her home just at the time he went away."

Major Jim turned very pale at this, and Launce thought that he darted a reproachful glance at his old friend.

"Yes. That's so," was all he said, and Launce saw there was something behind Major Jim's uncouth looks in the way of a secret sorrow.

Colonel Benton turned to his son.

"Where is Demetri? Where's Charley? Where are the boys?"

"I left them outside the gate and rode on before them to give you the news. I guess that's them now."

As he spoke came more clattering of hoofs, and Charley Benton rode into the court-yard on Alkader, with the beautiful Amina beside him on the chestnut mare of Jedaan.

The colonel ran forward to greet his son, but Launce stood and watched Major Jim.

The tall Kentuckian was staring at Amina with distended eyes as if he had seen a ghost, and as Launce watched him unobserved he saw the tears slowly gathering in the large gray eyes of Major Jim. The firm-looking lips were trembling and the yellow face was working, while Launce heard him whisper to himself something which the boy could not catch.

Colonel Benton, who knew the past of his guest better than the boys, took some time to

greet his children and to talk to Amina, who was exceedingly timid at finding herself alone among so many men, brought up as she had been in the comparative seclusion of a Bedouin harem. He talked to her about the Desert and the town, while he sent word round to the German consul, who was a married man, that he should be obliged if Madame Von Holtze would come round to the American consulate to take charge of a young lady.

When the good-natured German countess came in, he put Amina into her charge, to the girl's evident relief, and it was not till she had safely been packed off to the German consulate that he turned round to his old friend and said in a low tone:

"Well, Jim, did you see it?"

Major Jim had by this time quite recovered his equanimity, and he replied in the same tone:

"I could have sworn that the Lizzie Calhoun of twenty years ago had put on that fancy dress and was riding into this court. There can be no doubt she is her daughter, but how are we to know if my brother was her father or no?"

"If my boys say so you may depend on its being provable," replied the colonel, "for Charley is a very safe boy. Let us ask them how they know it is your niece and how they found her. And in the mean time, let us come in to dinner."

The arrangement was too good to be objected to; and over the first Oriental dinner Major Jim had ever eaten, and the first civilized meal the boys had seen since they went to the Desert, was told as much of Amina's story as the reader already knows.

When Major Jim had heard it all—except Charley's love-making, which was omitted probably from bashfulness—he expressed himself perfectly satisfied.

"Let me only see Peyton's picture and the legend on the case, and I will publicly acknowledge her," he said. "Ah, boys, it's a long time ago, but it comes back to me like as if it were yesterday. We Buckner boys both loved Lizzie Calhoun, but she favored Peet more than me. And when the war came on she was a regular bitter little reb, and that made her hate me, I verily believe."

"But I loved her all through, and would have married her ten times over if she would have had me. But it was not to be, and so when the war ended, one night she ran away from the old man's home, and broke his heart, for he never knew where she'd gone to his dying day. And now, after all these years, I find her child among the Arabs of the Desert, and poor Lizzie died of the plague in Bagdad fifteen years ago. It's wonderful, isn't it?"

And a few days afterward, when Amina and her new-found uncle had seen each other and all had been explained, every one pronounced it still more wonderful.

And when it further came out that the whole discovery was owing to Charley Ben on falling in love with a Bedouin girl, the wonder was not in any wise lessened.

Of course the major was not the man to refuse his consent to a match between the son of his old friend and his new-found niece. Major Jim was an old bachelor, and delighted at the pros-

pect of having a beautiful girl to put at the head of his big house in Kentucky.

But Colonel Benton was more moderate and sensible than his old friend, and opposed an immediate marriage on which Major Jim insisted at first.

"Amina has never known any life but that of a Bedouin tent," he said, "and it will be a hard task for her to make herself acquainted with civilization. Then, too, Charley is a youngster of nineteen not fit to take care of himself, let alone a wife, till he have discretion. Let them wait for two years till he's twenty-one and let her be educated into European ways till then. If they both like each other at the end of that time, well and good. If not, there's no harm done, and each can seek another and more suitable partner."

And thus it was settled, much to the satisfaction of Launce, who declared that he had had no comfort out of his brother since Charley had been in love.

"He goes sighing about all the time he's away from Amina and hasn't a word for anybody else. He's forgotten all he ever knew about fun, and I verily believe he wouldn't know a horse from a mule in one of his fits of love-sickness."

But Major Jim if he was not in love with a girl was just as much of a lunatic as Charley on two subjects, his niece and his new Arab horse and mares. His pride and pleasure in both were extreme and well founded. He insisted on paying the boys double price for Alkader and for each of the mares they had captured and whose pedigrees they had ascertained.

"What does it matter?" he said, when they objected. "Many a time have I paid five, ten or twenty thousand dollars for a single horse such as the English call a thoroughbred, when all the good blood that runs in his veins comes from Arabia and that's watered with poor stuff. And now I get the chance to have the real thoroughbred blood shall I stick at a few thousand dollars for six grand creatures like these? No, my boys. I should be a fool to hesitate. If these horses cost me ten thousand dollars apiece they would be cheap."

"The Godolphin Arabian was sold to an English Quaker out of a Paris dirt cart for twenty dollars, and he sired more winners of races than the best horse then in Europe. When I get home to old Kertuck we shall see what we shall see. I'll try whether the same blood that made the English thoroughbred what he is will not not make a still finer horse left to itself with the same care and feeding now lavished on a brute of half blood. I owe you young men much gratitude, and I shall never forget my obligations to the TWIN HORSEMEN."

THE END.

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